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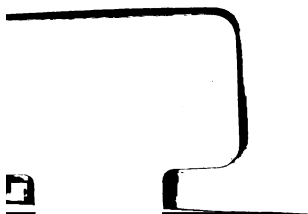
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THE STORY
OF
ALEC DRUMMOND,
OF THE 17TH LANCERS.

VOL. III.



THE STORY
OF
ALEC DRUMMOND,
OF THE 17TH LANCERS.

BY
FREDERICK MARTIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.



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ALEC DRUMMOND.

CHAPTER I.

"A still small voice spoke unto me,
'Thou art so full of misery,
Were it not better not to be?'"

TENNYSON, *The Two Voices*.

THE fall from my horse, resulting from extreme exhaustion, more than actual hurt, had stunned me completely, and for several minutes I remained in a fainting condition. Aroused again to full consciousness, I found myself lying in the corner of a small, dark room, crowded with Russian soldiers, many of whom were hurrying in and out, evidently in a state of great excitement. My first thought was of Donald, but strain as I did my eyes in all directions, I could not perceive him anywhere. There seemed to be no longer a doubt that he was killed. The

reflection brought on a fit of profound despondency, and the wish, heartfelt for the moment, that I had met death at the side of my cousin.

I was aroused, after a little while, from the morbid feeling of gloom that had taken possession of me by a sudden and loud firing, apparently not more than half a mile distant. At the same moment that the noise fell upon my ear, the mass of soldiers in the room rushed away, leaving behind none but a sentinel at the door, and a man outstretched in a corner opposite to that which I filled, who seemed to be badly wounded.

Deep silence now reigned all around, and I listened with eager attention to the sounds without, which got louder and louder. There was clearly an engagement taking place in the neighbourhood, and I fancied that I could distinguish amidst the far-off tumult the shouts of my old comrades in the Light Brigade.

The hope of being rescued put me into a high state of agitation, and almost involuntarily I raised myself against the wall, attempting to look through a narrow latticed window that was close above me. But a shout from behind made me

turn back immediately, and looking round, I saw the sentinel at the door lifting up his gun, and quietly levelling it at my head. There was too much eloquence in the movement that I could pretend to misunderstand it, and, resigning myself to fate, I humbly sank back into my dark corner.

The firing, for the next ten minutes or quarter of an hour, seemed to approach nearer and nearer; but then came a short lull, and after that a fresh discharge of carbines and rifles, more rapid than before, but evidently much farther away. All died off in another ten minutes, when there was once more deep silence, interrupted by nothing but the measured step of the sentinel at the door, and an occasional feeble groan from the wounded soldier opposite me.

The quiet did not last long, brought to an end by the return of the Russians, who announced their arrival from a distance by uproarious shouts, sounding not very dissimilar to an English hurrah. It was to all appearance denoting a success on their side, the fact of which remained no longer doubtful to me, when I saw the troop which had left before, pushing, in wild impetuosity and as wild disorder, into the room. In the

midst of them was an English prisoner, whose face I could not distinguish at once, but who seemed to be handled somewhat roughly, as he kept remonstrating with energy against the treatment he received.

"Keep your hands off, I say!" the prisoner cried, on crossing the threshold, "or, sure and faith, 'twill be the worse for you."

The tone and mode of utterance sounded familiar to me; nevertheless, I could not make out for the moment who was the speaker, his uniform being partly gone and partly torn to pieces, and his face and neck besmeared with blood. But repeating once more, "Keep your hands off!" I all at once recognised the voice of an old friend.

"Mike," I exclaimed, "is it you?"

The prisoner rushed forward, and having stared at me for a moment with wide-open eyes, bent down over me, grasped my hand with vehement affection, cried, "Why, who would have thought to meet you here, Alec!"

The meeting with my old companion was so entirely unexpected that I scarcely knew for the moment what to say or do. Mike, on his

part, kept silent for a few minutes, his mind apparently filled with doubt as to whether our gaolers would allow us to converse freely. His anxiety in this respect was only dispelled on perceiving that the fellows, whose previous treatment had raised his indignation, paid no further attention to him, engaged in a pursuit infinitely more interesting to them, that of dividing a quantity of plunder which they had brought, consisting mainly of torn uniforms and odds and ends of accoutrements.

Having watched our enemies for a short while, and seeing my comrade still perplexed and anxious, I could restrain my impatience to converse no longer. "Sit down, Mike, close to me, and let me know how you came here," I cried, and he instantly did what I desired.

"My story is a very short one, Alec," he muttered, after giving another side glance at the soldiers behind, "and it will not take me a minute to tell it. I was on vedette this morning, when these devils of Russians broke in upon us unawares, and got us into a fight, their numbers being to ours as twenty to one. How it happened, I do not know; but our sergeant and three of

us were cut off from the picket, and in the twinkling of an eye found ourselves right in the midst of a regiment of foot of the enemy. Of course, we did our best to cut our way through them, but to no purpose, for the sergeant and the other two were dragged from their saddles and made prisoners before they could look about much, and as for me I had but the benefit of a short race. After galloping for about half a mile, turning my lance into a good broom, I was stopped by another lot of these rascals."

Here Mike interrupted himself, turning his head over his shoulders. "Do you think it likely they understand English?" he asked, looking at his captors with a comical grimace.

"There is no officer among them," I made haste to reply, to stay his apprehensions; "and I do not think for a moment they know any other language but their own."

"Well, then," continued Mike, "when advancing, in full gallop, I suddenly got among a swarm of these beggars, who had no sooner seen me when they pitched into me with their bayonets. My poor horse was brought to the ground at once, and though I tried to defend myself as

best I could, with my back against a tree, they came so thick from behind and in front that it was of no use, and it was all over with me in a couple of minutes."

"Are you much hurt?" I asked my old comrade.

"Only a few scratches," he replied, wiping the blood off his face, and exhibiting in so doing a long cut across his ear, and a terrible gash under his chin,—“only a few scratches, not worth mentioning.” “But I am afraid,” he added, after a short pause, “you have fared badly. We all thought you had been carried off into the interior of Russia, and I am very much astonished to find you here. How did it happen?”

I gave my friend, in as few words as I could, an outline of my varied fortunes, to which he listened with great attention, only interrupting me now and then with “Well, I never!” and “It’s quite a story.”

“And what has become of your cousin? I remember him well!” Mike exclaimed at last, when I had come to an end.

“I am ignorant myself, and very anxious about him,” said I; “for I fear the worst.”

There was a pause of some minutes, Mike seemingly lost in reflection, the nature of which he at length announced to me in a whisper. "I was thinking as to how we could best get away; and I have no doubt we should be able to escape, even if I had to carry you part of the road, as it is not very far from our camp, and I know the direction pretty well. But what you say about your cousin alters the matter, for I do not think we ought to make off without knowing something more of him."

"I certainly shall not leave," cried I; "but if you see a chance for yourself, Mike, I would strongly advise you not to miss it."

"Do you expect they will take us soon inland—farther away from the camp?" my comrade inquired, in a hesitating manner.

"I have no doubt that will be done, if not to-day, at the latest to-morrow morning," I rejoined. I was going to say something more, but at that moment two soldiers came up from behind, one of them apparently a corporal, and taking my companion by the shoulder, rudely pushed him back into another corner of the room.

Quick as lightning, Mike took hold of the carbine of one of his assailants, and grasping the barrel firmly, prepared to lay the butt-end about him. But before he could make use of his improvised club, there was a stir among the soldiers in the background. I looked round, and saw a score of muskets levelled at me and my comrade.

CHAPTER II.

"It has a strange, quick jar upon the ear,
This cocking of a pistol, when you know
A moment more will bring the sight to bear
Upon your person, twelve yards off, or so."

BYRON, *Don Juan*.

I SPRANG to my feet, and in an instant was at the side of Mike.

"For heaven's sake, Mike, consider what you are doing!" I called out, staying his uplifted arm.

"How dare those beggarly rascals treat me the way they do!" shouted my companion, full of fury, at the same moment retreating two steps, and putting himself in a fighting attitude against the wall. I saw it was no good arguing with my infuriated friend; so I went quietly up to him, whispering, "Have you any money about you?"

Mike looked at me, still angry, and grumbled, "Yes, I have got money: do you want any?"

"Very much indeed," I replied; "lend me a shilling or two, if you can."

Mike gave me another stare, and then, without uttering a syllable, fumbled about in his overalls, and the next moment brought out two shillings, apparently not long from the mint. The two soldiers had no sooner beheld the glittering coins than they approached with an air of profound humility, evidently prepared to receive the bribe I was going to administer.

"Here, my men," I exclaimed, mustering up a few Russian words, "drink our health, and let us be friends;" and, taking the two shillings from the hand of Mike, who seemed unwilling to let them go, I put them into the open palm of the corporal, signifying, by a gesture, that his companion, as well as the other soldiers in the room, were to share in the gift. The man nodded, with a grin, and making a deep salaam, with his hand on his forehead, turned round quickly, and in a second was out of the room.

Mike evidently did not yet comprehend what was going on, for, looking at me in a perplexed manner, he exclaimed, not without a touch of

displeasure, "Do you know that fellow whom you have given the money?"

The question almost made me laugh. However, remembering the innocence of my comrade concerning Russian ways and manners, I hid the smile that was coming up, and tried to explain to him that what I had done was the only means of keeping our enemies from molesting us, and that, if I had not given the money to the soldiers, they would have certainly separated us, if not proceeding to worse extremities.

While trying to impress upon Mike the wonderful power of a silver shilling in Russia, of which he seemed to have no idea, the corporal returned with a large bottle in his hand, which he immediately proceeded to uncork, pouring out a quantity of the contents into a small tin mug. His first movement seemed to be to swallow what he had got; but, as if recollecting himself before the mug had gone as far as the promontory of his wide open mouth, he suddenly bent forward, and with a bow that was not at all ungraceful, offered the mug to me. I felt no inclination to taste the proffered drink, which appeared by the smell to be some potent compound

of spirits, so I declined it with a smile, at the same time pointing to my head, to indicate that I was not well. The mug thereupon went to Mike, who, without ceremony, emptied it at a draught.

"It's nasty stuff," exclaimed my comrade, making a wry face; "however, I've tasted worse in my life, particularly in that confounded country over the water, among the rascally Turks."

"I say, you may give me another drop," Mike added, addressing the corporal. But the latter was too occupied to listen to the appeal, being busy in pouring the contents of his bottle into a score of mugs, held by as many outstretched arms, and in helping himself at short intervals. Before many minutes were over, the fiery liquid was gone, a fact ascertained to demonstration by one of the soldiers, who had seized the bottle and held it upside down over his mouth, so as to make sure of the last drop. His companions watched his action, with deep interest expressed in their countenances, and perceiving that the supply had really and truly come to an end, the greater number threw themselves on the ground, some beginning to sing, and some to

talk with each other. They seemed to have forgotten us altogether, and fearing no further interruption, Mike once more drew close to me.

We were trying to converse again, as well as we could amidst the dreadful noise, when the door opened, and a Russian officer entered the room. Without paying much attention to what the soldiers were doing, he came straight towards us, and began asking, in broken English, intermixed with French words, our names, that of our regiments, whether we had been wounded, and some further particulars of the same kind. His questions showed that he was entirely unaware of the circumstances which had led me to fall captive a second time, and feeling but too glad of his ignorance, I framed my answers so as to make it appear that both my comrade and I had come together, only with this difference in our relative positions, that he had been taken a little later than I. Mike fully understood what I was aiming at, and conscious of the vast importance it would be to me not to let the fact come out that I was a prisoner who had tried to escape, he went further than I had done, boldly telling the officer that we both had been

together on picket in the morning, and been seized in the same engagement. It seemed that our inquisitor was rather proud of the affair of the day, in which he appeared to have taken a part, and his questions ended, he told us that all our wants should be attended to as far as was in his power. So saying, he left the room, calling out politely, "Adieu, messieurs."

The officer's promise was made good much sooner, and to a greater extent, than I expected it to be. He was not long gone when a young man, having the appearance of a hospital attendant, came up to us, and carefully, and with much skill, dressed my wounds and the more serious ones of Mike. Almost immediately after he had left, there came several men, peasants in appearance, carrying trays with refreshments, consisting of bread, grapes, a little cheese, and two eggs. Feeling almost faint from hunger, I was not a little pleased with the unlooked-for present, and Mike evidently sharing my desires, we both set to with a goodwill, and in a very short time had cleared the trays completely. The soldiers around us stared at us with envious looks while we were regaling ourselves, and their lean,

hungry countenances impressed my comrade so much that when he had eaten enough he proposed, in the fulness of his heart, to give them another shilling.

"You seem to have got rich, Mike," I could not help remarking.

He blushed a little, stuttering forth, "Well, yes! The fact is, my friends in the old country sent me a lot of money a few days ago, and I have not been able to spend it yet." Bending close to me he whispered, "You know, I've got five sovereigns sewn up in my shirt, besides what I have in pocket. So if you think it is right to give these poor devils a few shillings more, they're welcome to them."

"I can't see any harm in it, provided they buy food instead of drink," I replied; upon which Mike at once dived down into his capacious overalls, and got out some other glittering coins. They were no sooner shining in the air, than our old friend the corporal rushed forward, his right hand on his forehead, and his left stretched out in significant curve. I was going to deliver myself of a short sentence, expressive of the wish that the money should be spent entirely upon

food, and not upon drink, but before I could utter a single word Mike's silver—some three or four shillings, as far as I could see—was transferred from his hand to that of the corporal, and the latter had closed the door behind him.

"He's a remarkably quick sort of a fellow," exclaimed my comrade, staring after the recipient of his cash.

I was not without fear that the gift, thus bestowed, was unwise; but the result proved infinitely more disastrous than I could have imagined. To my consternation, and almost horror, the corporal returned at the end of a few minutes with a stone bottle under each arm, and his companions forming at once round him in a circle, the drinking-bout commenced without a moment's delay. Thinking, probably, that all our wants had been satisfied, the corporal, this time, offered neither to me nor to Mike a taste from his spirit store, but kept the whole to himself, pouring the contents of the two bottles as fast as possible into the mugs of his companions, and a tumbler which he had brought for himself. The result manifested itself with extraordinary rapidity in a

tumult of such violence as to make both Mike and me tremble with alarm.

Having emptied to the last drop the two bottles of spirits, the soldiers first began to sing, and then, immediately after, to quarrel with each other. Not many minutes elapsed before the uproar had become demoniacal, the whole of the drunken crew shouting at the top of their voices, and many wrestling together, and pushing each other about with great force. The disturbance was reaching a climax when the door opened, and the officer who had visited us before appeared on the threshold. He seemed to take in at a glance both the immediate and mediate cause of the tumult, and approaching us, asked me, in a severe tone, whether we had given money to the soldiers to procure spirits?

I acknowledged that we had done so, in a few words, attempting no apology.

"Perhaps your intention was to make the men drunk, and to escape in the confusion?" the officer continued, in a sneering tone.

"I assure you, sir, we had no intention to escape," replied I, trying to speak with as much firmness as possible.

The officer looked at me with a searching glance, and seemed on the point of saying something more, in a kindlier manner, when a tall man, richly dressed, in half-military, half-civil costume, entered the door and came straight towards us. Examining me for a minute from head to foot, he stretched forth his hand, exclaiming, in French, "You are a prisoner escaped from Simpheropol, and I arrest you in the name of the Commander-in-chief."

Then, addressing the officer at our side, who stood lost in blank astonishment, he cried out, "See that he is put in chains: he has been condemned to death."

The words had no sooner been spoken, when, at a sign from the officer, I was seized by half-a-dozen soldiers, who set to dragging me to the door. But their progress, all on a sudden, was stopped by the entrance of two more persons. I looked up, and for a moment thought to behold a vision, when I saw my young friend Boris stand before me, at the side of an elderly gentleman in general's uniform, whom I recognised as his father.

The latter made a movement with his hand,

upon which the crowd of soldiers fell back a step, ranging themselves at attention along the wall, upright and mute like statues. At another sign, the officer bent his sword and uttered a word of command, whereupon the men shouldered arms, wheeled round, and then marched out of the room, with heavy tramp, leaving Mike and me alone with Prince Labanoff and his son.

CHAPTER III.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head."

SHAKESPEARE, *As You Like It*.

THE door had no sooner closed behind the soldiers, when Boris rushed up to me in a very excited manner, while his father got himself a chair from a corner and sat down, a faint smile playing on his lips.

"Do you know who has brought us here just in time to save you?" exclaimed my young friend, shaking me by the hand with great warmth.

I felt so bewildered that I could find no words to speak, upon which Boris went on, "You'll never guess, and therefore I will tell you at once. It was Nikita!"

"Is it possible?" I could not help exclaiming;
"I was not aware having done the least thing to

make Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky take an interest in my fate."

"He would have come up with us," Boris added, "but that on the road, about half a verst from here, our Dr. Schwartz discovered, lying in a field, your cousin Donald, who seems to be badly wounded; and to attend to him the two remained behind."

At the moment my cousin's name was mentioned, Mike, whom I had almost forgotten, jumped up in his corner, exclaiming, "I will see after Donald, if you will get me leave."

Boris was evidently startled at the sudden appearance of my comrade, whom he did not seem to have noticed before; and, turning towards me with an inquiring look, he asked, in French, "Is that a friend?"

"A trusty companion," I replied, "who served in the same regiment with me, and who was taken prisoner this morning, as I understand, in an outpost engagement which occurred not far from this place."

"I am glad to hear it," cried Boris; "not that he is prisoner, but that you have found another friend. We will try to do something for him."

And, stepping up to Mike, he courteously saluted him, which little bit of politeness, however, was only replied to by a grunt.

Prince Labanoff, who had not spoken a word as yet, looked on with seeming impatience while his son turned aside to Mike, a shade of vexation playing on his countenance. It appeared to me, as I glanced at him, that the part he was taking in acting as my protector was a somewhat unwilling one, forced upon him by others; and anxious that it should not be prolonged unnecessarily, I went up to Boris, asking him to express to his father the sense of my extreme gratitude for all that he had condescended to do for me.

However, there was no time for Boris to act as the mouthpiece of my sentiments; for I had scarcely finished saying what I intended, when his father arose from his seat and came nearer to me.

"Je suis fâché que je n'ai pas plus de temps à moi," he exclaimed, with a gracious smile, "mais vous me reverrez bientôt. En attendant, je ferai tout ce que je peux pour vous." And waving his hand in a condescending manner, the prince quitted the room, having previously addressed to

his son a few Russian words, the meaning of which I could not understand.

When his parent had left, Boris seemed for a moment under the influence of a little diffidence. But it wore off immediately, and, before many minutes were gone, he had launched out in his usual animated chat, asking me all manner of questions as to the events that had followed my departure from Baktchi-Serai, and telling me, at the same time, how it had come to pass that he had found me. It appeared that the prince, his father, had been witness to our arrest, and that, moreover, the driver who had taken my cousin and me to Simpheropol, with instructions to deposit us safely at a country-house situated a few miles beyond it, belonging to a retired merchant, an intimate friend of Dr. Schwartz, after waiting for several hours at the guard-house, and not seeing us return, had made inquiries which disclosed the fact of our having been thrown into prison.

"The only thing I cannot understand in this whole affair," my noble young friend exclaimed, "is the part Nikita has taken in it. As far as I have been able to learn, the doctor received the

news that you and your cousin had been thrown into prison late at night. It seems that he hurried immediately to Nikita, and it was due to the persuasion of the latter that my father consented to rise some hours before daybreak, in order to ascertain your fate. I am sure Dr. Schwartz would not have had the slightest chance to accomplish the same, any more than I could have done."

"I do not know whether you are aware," Boris continued, in a confidential tone, "that my honoured parent looks upon me as a fool; and I should say, therefore, that the fact of your having saved my life does not go very far with him. As to Nikita, 'c'est une chose tout-à-fait différente.' He's rich, and there is a whisper that my father owes him a great deal of money—more than he would like to pay, if asked for at once."

His own remarks seemed to set my young friend musing, and for a couple of minutes he was lost in silence that seemed perfectly unnatural with him. All at once he gave a start, striking his forehead with his hand.

"What an idiot I was, not to think of it before!" he exclaimed; "it must have been Bertha

who urged him to it, as nobody but she has any influence over him."

I felt a thrill through my whole frame on hearing the name of Bertha, and the connexion in which it was brought forward. Boris, having given vent to his exclamation, seemed once more inclined to lapse in silence, and anxious not to let him drop the subject, I asked whether Bertha was not the same young lady who had looked in for a few moments while we had been at dinner.

"Precisely the same," replied my friend; "and don't you think she is a pretty girl? You know, Nikita has been making love to her ever since she came, with her aunt, to our house. But I somehow fancy, though I do not know exactly why, that he has not been too successful in the business. She is a strange creature altogether, wonderfully romantic, not a bit vain, and, I must say, quite different from the run of young ladies. What do you think? She has actually brought Nikita to attempt translating poetry from English into Russian, and, as he is going on, I do not fancy he will be much longer a Nihilist. It was but yesterday——"

The sentence was interrupted by the opening of

the door, on the threshold of which there appeared Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky, side by side with Dr. Schwartz. The count for a moment fastened his keen dark eyes upon me, scrutinising me from head to foot, and then advanced with a polite but frosty bow. I was about to give vent to a few words of thanks for the interest he had shown on my behalf, when Dr. Schwartz came up and shook me by the hand, throwing me at the same time a significant look, which I construed into meaning not to speak to Count Labanoff.

"I do not know whether Boris has told you," began the doctor, addressing me, "that we found your cousin in a field near the roadside, wounded in neck and shoulder, and faint from loss of blood. We fortunately came in time. I dressed his wounds, and took him into a comfortable cottage, and he is getting on as well now as can be expected."

"Can I see him, and could I get permission to be with him, to nurse him?" I stuttered hesitatingly.

"You ask too much," replied Dr. Schwartz, his countenance assuming a serious look. "Perhaps you are not aware that sentence of death

has been pronounced against both your cousin and you, for the triple offence of assaulting an officer in the service of the Emperor, of breaking out of prison, and of feloniously taking possession of two horses belonging to a Cossack regiment. I can assure you that if it had not been for the powerful influence of Prince Labanoff, exerted energetically in your favour, your lives would have been forfeited beyond all doubt. Even now it is uncertain whether the prince will be able to keep you from being sent to Siberia. He is at this moment awaiting a reply to a communication he has forwarded by courier to the commander-in-chief at Sebastopol."

I felt singularly oppressed by the communication. When told previously that I had been condemned to the last penalty, I had no fear of any kind, unconscious of the terror of death. But the perspective now held out before me, of being possibly doomed to life-long imprisonment and slavery, caused a cold shiver to run through my veins. Dr. Schwartz appeared to perceive my agitation, and coming up close to me, laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Things look darker than they are," he whis-

pered into my ear; "I will not forsake you whatever may happen." Then turning round to Nikita and Boris, the doctor exclaimed, in French, "I think we had better leave, and see what news may be arriving from head-quarters. There is a report that their Imperial Highnesses the Grand Dukes Nicholas and Michael are visiting the lines of General Liprandi to-day, and they may possibly come here."

The last words, uttered in an off-hand manner, had the effect of making Boris immediately turn to the door. He appeared to have been anxious, the moment before, to continue talking with me; but the remark about the Imperial Grand Dukes evidently made him change his intentions, and he hurried away without even bidding me farewell.

Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky followed in his steps, though not without having previously fastened upon me a long and searching look. I fancied he wished to have some conversation, but was restrained by the presence of the doctor, as well as of Mike, who stood in the corner, keeping his eyes upon him in a singular manner. Turning on his heels, Nikita made another frosty bow, and then left the room. Dr. Schwartz rushed

after him with some precipitation, exclaiming hurriedly, in taking me by the hand, "You will see me again before night, and as to your cousin he shall be well cared for."

The door having shut behind the last of our visitors, I found myself quite alone with Mike. He seemed in bad humour, for without opening his lips, he turned his back upon me, looking through the window, and drumming with his fingers against the wall. I left him undisturbed for a little while; but the silence becoming oppressive, I asked, "What is the matter with you, Mike?"

"Nothing is the matter with me, that I am aware of," he answered, sullenly; "only I am thinking about the best way from here to our camp." "I mean to try to escape?" he added, after a little pause.

The communication somewhat surprised me; however, I said nothing, unwilling either to encourage my comrade in the attempt to regain liberty, or to divert him from it. It seemed to me, too, that his sudden resolve was but the outburst of momentary anger, he feeling offended for not having been spoken to by the distinguished visitors who had come to see me; and persuaded

that the lapse of an hour or two would set us right again, I stretched out once more in my corner, and, under a sense of extreme fatigue and exhaustion, tried to go to sleep. But it was some time before sound slumber would come over my eyes. The events of the last twenty-four hours kept sending their flashes hither and thither across my memory, and my excited imagination set to conjuring up all sorts of strange forms and phantasms, to clothe them into a picture of the future. At last, whether waking or dreaming, I fancied I heard a rapid exchange of shots near at hand, which continued for a little while, and then gradually died away, like a faint echo, in the far distance.

The continued even roll made me fall asleep, carrying me rapidly into the land of dreams. One vision after the other kept starting up, alternately sunny and cloudy, mild and terrible, till in the end I thought I had ceased dreaming and was transplanted into fierce reality.

A couple of soldiers laid hold of me, pinioned my arms, and led me forth from my couch, into a field close by the road. There were a number of Russian soldiers drawn up, standing at attention,

and in front of them an officer with drawn sword. I knew at once the fate that awaited me. Led towards a tree, in front of the file of soldiers, my eyes were bandaged, and the men who had pinioned my arms, forced me down to kneel, and then left me.

I awaited, with suspended breath, the crack of the muskets directed towards me, but the sound seemed an endless time in coming. The officer in front of the file twice called out, his words sounding like a command to fire, yet still the shots did not come, and the bullets, which I expected every instant, did not touch my breast. Unable to bear the suspense any longer, I at last arose on my knees, and tried to tear the bandage from my eyes.

"He's awake at last," said a gruff voice close to my ear, which I instantly recognised as that of Mike. Close to him was the portly figure of Dr. Schwartz, and a little in the background, scarce visible in the dark room, stood two bearded men, in tall fur caps, with lanterns in their hands.

CHAPTER IV.

"Heaven has to all allotted, soon or late,
Some lucky revolution of their fate,
Whose motions we must watch and guide with skill,
For human good depends on human will.
Our fortune rolls as from a smooth descent,
And from the first impression takes the bent;
But if unseized, she glides away like wind,
And leaves repenting folly far behind."

DRYDEN, *Absalom and Achitophel*.

"TIME is flying fast: rouse yourself, for we have not a minute to lose!" exclaimed the doctor, as I was raising myself upright, staring into his face, still partly under the influence of sleep, and the terrible dream of the last hour.

"What am I to do? What has happened?" I stammered forth, trying to understand the state of things around me.

"You must come with us this very instant," Dr. Schwartz cried, with visible impatience; "there is a troop of Cossacks close at hand to

take you in charge, and back to the Simpheropol prison. Rouse yourself, I say. We have already lost too much time to stir you out of your death-like sleep."

I felt too confused to do anything but nod my acquiescence in all that was to be done, upon which the doctor and Mike put their arms round me, and half guided, half carried me out of the room, and across a courtyard, while the fur-capped men walked close behind, holding up their lanterns. From the yard we got into a dark lane, bounded by a fence on either side, so narrow as barely to allow two persons to march abreast in it.

Not being able to get forward here, Dr. Schwartz stopped for a moment, whispering to one of his bearded followers, who instantly handed over his lantern to him, and, lifting me upon his shoulders, bore me off as if I had been a mere infant. We now passed quickly on, up the lane, across a broad meadow, and into a wood, which we had no sooner reached when I heard the sound of a feeble whistle.

"Here he is!" the doctor called out, in German, addressing the man who carried me,

who now pushed on with longer strides, and at the end of a few minutes put me down in an open clearing, in the middle of which stood a long four-wheeled waggon, resembling very much a carrier's cart, to which were harnessed three shaggy little ponies. The head of an elderly white-haired man looked out from the side opening of the conveyance as we approached, and having beckoned to Dr. Schwartz, the latter at once went up to him.

There was a short conversation, carried on in whispers, which having come to an end, the doctor took me by the arm, and led me to the cart, face to face with its inmate. "Here is Herr Anton Ulrich, wine-grower and landowner in the village of Friedenthal," he exclaimed; "I give you into his charge, with absolute trust that he will guard and protect you as if you were his own son."

The elderly man bowed his head, and I did the same, whereupon Dr. Schwartz, as if suddenly remembering something, called out, "I believe you speak German?"

"Scarcely sufficient to make myself well understood," I replied.

"All right," exclaimed the doctor, with a smile; "you may take lessons from Herr Ulrich, who can do other things than transform good grapes into bad wine. Nicht wahr, mein Freund?"

The rally met with no answer from Herr Ulrich, who kept his eyes directed towards the end of the path by which we had come, with an evident expression of anxiety. Dr. Schwartz clearly understood the meaning of the look, and taking me by the hand, and exclaiming, "Farewell, I shall see you again," motioned to me to take my place in the cart. I went to clamber up the steps, with Mike close behind, and a moment after, we two were snugly ensconced amidst a mass of straw, which filled the conveyance nearly to the top, leaving just room in front for the driver.

"You need give yourself no uneasiness about your cousin," the doctor's voice sounded from below. I was about to reply, when the crack of a whip made itself heard, and we rolled away at a high speed.

The jolting of the cart, though very great, did not give me any pain, the abundance of straw

taking off all concussion ; but at the same time the noise was so loud as to make conversation impossible, and, therefore, without attempting to talk with my comrade, I thought it best to compose myself once more to sleep. But my rest did not last long, for we could not have gone, according to my calculation, more than three or four miles, when the waggon came to a standstill, and our friendly conductor asked us to come down from our couch, and to enter a house in front of which we were halting.

We did as required, and guided by Herr Ulrich stepped into a low cottage, closely adjoining the road along which we were travelling. It appeared to be an excessively humble tenement looked at from the outside, and I was surprised, at the first glance into the interior, to see a very comfortable little room, the floor covered with felt, a neat fireplace against the wall, and a divan running nearly all around.

Equally to my surprise, the two fur-capped men I had seen before, and who, I fancied, had remained behind with their lanterns, in the company of Dr. Schwartz, were sitting on the carpeted floor, the one engaged in fanning

a blazing fire on the hearth, and the other in unpacking a large bundle of clothes, corded tightly together. The latter, as soon as he saw us enter, went up to Herr Ulrich, and having received some orders about the "Pferde," or horses, made his way out, while we sat down on the sofa.

"Well, these ain't bad quarters, by any means," Mike broke out, rubbing his hands, his face assuming a most contented look; "and if a smack of something could be got, we needn't run away too fast."

I made a sign to my comrade to restrain himself a little, but Herr Ulrich, who seemed to understand what he had said, instantly took up the conversation in German.

"You shall have very soon some refreshments," he exclaimed; "only before taking to eat and drink, you must dress." And he pointed to the heap of garments that was lying on the floor, in the middle of the room.

"Dress! What do you mean?" I cried out in astonishment.

"What I mean is this," said Herr Ulrich, speaking very slowly, "that if you do not

exchange your uniform, which, by-the-bye, is somewhat the worse for wear, for the clothes here before you, the Cossacks will catch you, and, most probably, shoot you."

I could scarce help from laughing at the droll manner in which the words were spoken; however, the argument conveyed was irresistible, and I hesitated not to conform to it. Mike, though he could not have understood what was said, appeared to take in at a glance what was wanted, and divesting himself quickly of his tunic and overalls, or rather the tattered remnants of them, signified by a pantomime that he was ready to decorate his person in any other manner that might be deemed requisite.

The process was soon accomplished, under the able assistance of Herr Ulrich. With a good-humoured smile on his lips, he handed to each of us, first, a pair of morocco slippers; next a waistcoat, embroidered in front, with pockets at each side; then, a pair of trousers, made of some light stuff, very full, and loose in shape; then, a long caftan, of blue cloth, slit below and at the sides, with close-fitting sleeves attached; and, lastly, a cylindrical fur cap, above a foot high,

closed at the top by scarlet cloth, and trimmed with silver lace. It was the complete Tartar costume, and not an unhandsome one, by any means. "Sehr gute Kleider," remarked our conductor, seeing that I looked approvingly at the dresses; and I assented, crying out, "Ja wohl, mein Herr."

I was the first to don the new clothes, and the turban was on my head, when Mike, squatting on the floor, and apparently not able to get into his embroidered waistcoat, looked up at me. He had no sooner done so, when he broke out into an immoderate fit of laughter.

"Well, Alec," he cried, half choked by the spasms of his excessive hilarity, "I never saw such a Guy in all my life as you have turned into. You would frighten the ghost of your great-grandmother as you stand there, in that coat and headpiece."

I felt just the least bit nettled at my friend's uncomplimentary remark; but whatever there was of resentment within me died off on looking at Mike, who had managed at last to put his burly limbs into the embroidery, and the blue caftan with the close-fitting sleeves, and was trying

on the fur turban. Anything more ludicrous than the figure he looked, I thought I had never seen, and although I knew he would be offended if I were to laugh at him as he had at me, I could not stifle my mirth, but gave vent to it unrestrainedly.

Luckily, at the moment Herr Ulrich approached with a bottle in his hand, the sight of which prevented my comrade, over-sensitive in all matters concerning his personal appearance, from getting angry. Having declared his belief that our new dresses fitted us "sehr schön," he offered to each of us a glass of wine, explaining that it was his own produce, famous all over the Crimea, and in the southern provinces of Russia.

I took only a few drops of the wine, finding it excessively sour, and not at all to my taste; however, Mike seemed to be of a different opinion, and coolly asking our host to give him the bottle, emptied it in the twinkling of an eye. On the spur of the moment, I felt inclined to apologise for my companion, but changed my intention on perceiving that Herr Ulrich, so far from feeling offended at the expe-

ditionous despatch of his wine, was taking it as a compliment.

"Sehr gut! sehr gut!" he called out, staring fixedly, with a half-inquiring look, at Mike, as if seeking approbation of the produce of his fields.

My comrade evidently understood the glance. "It's capital stuff," he cried, speaking very loud, so as to make his English better understood by our German friend; "I say, do you happen to have any more of it near at hand?"

Herr Ulrich grinned, and leaving the room, returned the moment after with another bottle in his hand. He was going to uncork it, in order to hand it over to my comrade, with whose appreciation of Crimean grape juice he was evidently much pleased, when I stopped him, begging that he would give us a little to eat, before we had more to drink. The worthy wine-grower took the hint at once, and having stuck his bottle into one of the capacious pockets of his caftan, proceeded to a sort of cupboard, close to the fire-place, and withdrew therefrom a large loaf of bread, together with a jar of honey, which he placed on the floor, in the

middle of the room. There was no pressure needed to make us partake of the proffered cheer, and both Mike and I did justice to it with a good appetite.

During our meal, I addressed a number of questions to Herr Ulrich regarding the road we were taking, and our ultimate destination, to all which he gave the frankest replies. He told me that the south-eastern coast of the Crimea, distinguished for its beautiful scenery, was 'a favourite sojourn of Russian nobles, looked upon by them as 'a native Switzerland, and so much in fashion that many of them continued residing here in spite of the war; that, furthermore, his business, as a grower of and dealer in wines, led him to visit every year the range of small towns, villages, and estates along the sea-shore, and that having made his annual tour, going as far as Sebastopol to dispose of the remainder of his stock, he was now returning home to his place of settlement, the German colony of Friedenthal.

I was much struck by the news that a peaceful wine merchant should dare to move about in this manner on the outskirts of great armies, engaged

in furious fight ; but further explanations showed me that the dangers menacing either our guide's person or property were more apparent than real.

His wines, I was informed, graced the tables of the principal generals of the Russian army, and he was the bearer of a special passport from Prince Menschikoff, commander-in-chief of the Imperial forces, allowing him, not only to pass free through all the lines, but to procure, if required, military assistance for his protection.

"You have a passport for yourself," I interrupted, seized by a sudden feeling of anxiety, "but how will you manage to carry us along?"

"My passport," Herr Ulrich replied, very quietly, "gives me the right to take two assistants with me, and I have got them, as you may have seen. But by arrangements made under the direction of Dr. Schwartz, my men will be left behind in this cottage, of which they have obtained temporary possession, and you and your friend will supply their place as my companions."

I could not help stretching forth my hand and pressing that of Herr Ulrich, warmly thanking him for his more than kindness ; but the next instant my thoughts wandered to Dr. Schwartz,

evidently the presiding genius in all that concerned our movements.

"Although you have a passport," I ventured to remark, "you nevertheless run immense risk in helping us to escape, and, not knowing us at all, your attachment to Dr. Schwartz must be very great to do so?"

Our guide looked at me for a moment with a fixed stare, and then exclaimed, with almost solemnity, "My love for him is great indeed, for he has——"

The sentence was interrupted by the rushing in of the man who had gone outside to attend to our horses and cart. "I can hear the approach of Cossacks," he cried, addressing his master; "they will be up in ten minutes."

"We must be off!" Herr Ulrich exclaimed, "for there is peril in remaining here." Taking me by one arm, and Mike by the other, he almost pushed us out of the door, directing us, in a brief commanding voice, to take to our former places in the waggon. We had scarcely done so when we were in movement, our active ponies careering at full speed. In spite of the shaking of the cart, I could distinctly hear, at the

end of a few minutes, the clatter of horses' feet behind us. It sounded exactly like the measured drum that followed in the wake of Donald and me in our flight from Simpheropol.

CHAPTER V.

"For men as resolute appear
With too much as too little fear;
And, when they're out of hopes of flying,
Will run away from death, by dying,
Or turn again to stand it out,
And those they fled like lions rout."

BUTLER, *Hudibras*.

NOTWITHSTANDING the protection of our disguise, and the consciousness of the passport of which Herr Ulrich had told me, I felt some alarm on listening to the clang of the Cossack horse in our rear. My disquietude was not lessened by a look at our conductor. Pressing down the straw on which we were lying, so as to make an opening to the front, I could see him, in the light of a feeble moon that was just rising in front of us, half upright on his narrow seat, with head bent forward, urging his steeds by words and occasional touch of the whip to use their utmost exertions to get on. The ponies, wiry little

animals, unbeautiful in appearance, but of apparently great strength of bone and muscle, galloped along fiercely, at a quite extraordinary speed; nevertheless, I felt certain that the horse behind were gaining upon us, the hammering thump becoming every minute more clear and loud. Having sped onward for about a mile, Herr Ulrich seemed to become aware of the same fact, for he all at once fell back on his seat, and half dropping his reins murmured to himself, "It's no use!"

We had arrived at the foot of a hill, or mountain, not very steep, but apparently of great extent, the end of the road being quite invisible. Urged on no longer, the ponies, visibly exhausted by the efforts they had made, walked slowly, so that before we had proceeded a long way the horse behind had come up with us. Through the opening in the side of our cart, I could see some five score Cossack lances gleaming in the moonlight, and watch the bearers circle round us, clearly bent upon investigating the contents of the conveyance they had reached.

I felt my heart throb on beholding one of them, by his dress an officer, ride up to the front, and in

a commanding tone speak to our conductor. The latter instantly stopped the horses, but kept to his seat, not uttering a word, and trying apparently to behave as stoical and careless as possible. The officer next addressed to him some rapid questions, the nature of which I could easily guess, as they were followed by the production of a small packet of papers, like a book, which Herr Ulrich drew from a leather bag that was fastened around his waist. The packet, I could not doubt, contained the passport of Prince Menschikoff.

It took the commander of the Cossacks a long while to read the papers given to him, and the more he looked at them, the more they seemed to puzzle him. At last, after a conversation with several of his men, he said something which made Herr Ulrich give a slight start, and turn round towards me. "Get down," he whispered; "they want to examine you. In the name of heaven speak German only, and tell your companion to pretend that he is deaf and dumb." Communicating the order to Mike, we both made our way out of the cart, and the next moment found ourselves in the midst of the crowd of Cossacks, who surrounded us at once as if to take us prisoners.

Prince Menschikoff's passport, I had surmised before, contained a description of the bearer, as well as of the persons accompanying him; and any doubt on the subject disappeared when I saw the officer get from his horse, take up the papers handed to him once more, and put himself close in front of me and Mike. To my infinite satisfaction, the moon at this moment was hidden behind some clouds, so as to leave scarce light to distinguish features minutely. The officer nevertheless continued scanning the passport, but not being able to get on with it, he called to one of the Cossacks, who ran up quickly, and fumbling for a moment in his pocket, got out steel and flint, struck fire, and lighted a small lantern. I felt a strange feeling creep over me when the lantern was swung right before my eyes, and I recognised in the bearer one of the men, conspicuous for his size and cast of features, who had quitted the barracks of Simpheropol on the night my cousin and I had broken out of prison.

Under the light thrown upon our faces, the Cossack officer resumed the reading of Herr Ulrich's passport. Watching him closely, I could plainly see that his mind was all perplexity, he

having strong suspicions, on the one hand, that we were not the persons represented to be, but, on the other, being full of fear to counteract the injunctions of so important a document as the order of protection of the commander-in-chief.

All at once, as if struck by a sudden thought, he addressed me in voluble language; but for reply I only shook my head, exclaiming in German, "I don't understand Russian; I have not been long in the country." Herr Ulrich took up the dialogue, saying something which I understood to be confirmatory of my assertion, and pointing at the same time to Mike. The latter from the commencement had played his part of a deaf and dumb person admirably, staring about in a vacant manner, as if supremely indifferent to all that was going on around us. Looking at him as he stood there, in his long blue caftan and high fur cap, he appeared to me like a changed man. I wondered how I ever could have found his dress ridiculous, for now he was every inch a Tartar and stoic philosopher.

Having stared at us for an immense length of time, and taken counsel with nearly every one of his men, the officer at last handed back the passport

to our friend and guide. I could see by the look with which he did it that we were safe; but careful not to express any feeling of satisfaction, I asked Herr Ulrich in German, in as angry a tone as I could assume, how long we were to be kept on the road here.

"I suppose till these brave warriors have had something to drink," he replied, giving a half savage chuckle, and glancing round at the same time at a knot of Cossacks in the rear, who had been engaged for some time past in examining the straw with which the cart was filled, poking their long spears into every corner. Following the direction of Herr Ulrich's eyes, I perceived some of the fellows taking out bottles, and hiding them under their long cloaks, while others, farther in the background, were engaged in gulping down the wine of which they had possessed themselves in so free and easy a fashion.

Having watched them for a minute or two, the wine-grower of Friedenthal seemed to think that the sport of which he was the victim had lasted long enough, for addressing the officer in a loud tone he said something which made the latter go to the rear and push back his men from the cart.

This done, Mike and I, at a sign from Herr Ulrich, took our seats again, and immediately after moved slowly off. Looking back through the opening in the cart, I saw the Cossacks ride away from us in full gallop. I drew a long breath.

CHAPTER VI.

"The clouds dispell'd, the sky resum'd her light,
And nature stood recover'd of her fright ;
But fear, the last of ills, remained behind,
And horror heavy sat on every mind."

DRYDEN, *Tempest*.

It was evident that we had narrowly escaped being again made prisoners, and my heart was full of gratitude to our German friend, who had risked so much to save us. But on my proceeding to express my feelings, he motioned me to be quiet, pointing forward with his whip, as if hinting that he had other things to do than to talk. I soon discovered what it meant. The up-hill road on which we were proceeding was gradually getting more and more difficult. There were tall rocks on the one side, over the fallen boulders of which, split into a thousand fragments, our nimble-footed ponies had to drag the cart, while on the other side the ground fell off precipitately, not leaving the eye to measure the

depth. The ear only, listening to the fall of the rolling stones as they, detached from the ground, went thumping from rock to rock, was able to measure the depth of the abyss.

"A beautiful bit of country," exclaimed Herr Ulrich, having turned a sharp corner, at which for an instant it seemed as if no skill in driving could prevent a tumble over into the yawning precipice; "I once had with me a great traveller, a countryman of yours, who called it a terrestrial paradise; but when I offered him the reins, somewhere here about, he declined, and seemed to get rather fidgety."

"What is the name of the road, or the district, we are in?" I asked, glad to see our protecting friend get a little more communicative.

"This is the celebrated Vale of Baidar," he replied, "of which you may have read in books. Russians, and other visitors, as a rule, show themselves most anxious to see it; but I am always exceedingly anxious to get out of it, and feel very glad we have now nearly reached the southern border."

All the associations connected in my mind with the name of the Vale of Baidar were that my poor cousin had tried to reach it in our flight from

Simpheropol, and curious to learn how far he had been right in his topographical calculations, I inquired of Herr Ulrich the distance from the place we were to Balaclava.

"Barely sixteen versts," was the answer. He had no sooner uttered the words, when he exclaimed, "I hope you do not think of escaping to your camp? The attempt, I am certain, would be a mere running into the face of death, as every inch of ground is guarded by Cossacks. Besides, I heard at Sebastopol, from the mouth of Prince Menschikoff himself, that the invading armies are doomed, as much as the armies of the great Napoleon were when marching upon Moscow."

The prophecy, boastful and exaggerated though it appeared to me, made me shudder. That English soldiers would succumb under Russian swords, I knew was nigh impossible; but that pestilence, hunger, and cold might exterminate the gallant host whom I had seen land at Eupatoria, and whose miseries I had shared for a month and a half, did not appear to me by any means beyond the reach of fatal chance, and thinking of it, and of all the horrors I had witnessed, my heart began to ache.

To learn something more about the actual state of our army, I turned to Mike, but found he had fallen fast asleep ; and on addressing Herr Ulrich again, I got but short and meagre replies, he seeming to be unwilling to talk on military subjects. As if to draw my attention from them, he pointed out the varying features of the surrounding scenery, which assumed ever grander forms. We were in the midst of a dark defile of mountains, with overhanging crags high above, which looked as if ready every moment to fall down and crush us in their huge embrace. It seemed to be getting daylight, for streaks of red clouds were visible eastward ; but they only showed in glimpses, the tall rocks, crowned with sombre pine trees, through which cataracts came leaping, shutting out nearly all prospect in front of us.

“In about five minutes you will have a sight such as, probably, you never saw in your life,” our conductor cried out, after we had passed under a frowning ledge of rock, along a piece of road so narrow as not to leave more than a couple of inches between the outer wheels of our cart and a yawning gulf, falling off perpendicularly,

apparently of immense depth. I was still under the influence of a slight tremor, caused by looking down into the abyss, when, turning round sharply, we got to the top of the massive rock which had just hung over our heads, and which seemed to form a sort of natural bridge spanning a chasm. Having passed safely over it, we entered a gallery some forty or fifty yards in length, bounded at the end by scarlet clouds, appearing exactly like a curtain drawn before a large window. Approaching the cloud curtain, our waggon stopped. I was on the tiptoe of expectation.

Without uttering a word, Herr Ulrich took me by the hand, and, helping me from the cart, led me a few yards forward. I was prepared to look upon a beautiful piece of scenery, but the sight my eyes beheld far surpassed anything I could have anticipated. For a few seconds, I scarcely knew whether I was waking or dreaming, so overpowering was the grandeur and magnificence of the picture outspread before me. I was standing upon the edge of a lofty mountain range; apparently more than three thousand feet high, with the dark sea deep below at my feet, stretching

away into infinitude to the right and in front, and bounded to the left by a dome of fiery red clouds. It was a scene almost too majestic for quiet contemplation, the eye losing itself in the sublimity of the objects all around, and seeking in vain a place on which to rest for a moment. There was no trace of things fashioned by human beings, or reminding of human existence, visible anywhere. Grand, rugged, and in cyclopic shapes the mountains arose from their base and overhung the sea; vast and illimitable, with not a speck visible on the boundless expanse, the world of waters was lying outstretched; and, sublime in their glow of ethereal colours, the gigantic sky-born cloud-masses towered up, connecting earth and heaven. Admiration was dumb, and the soul lost itself in mute worship.

All on a sudden, the rays of the rising sun shot forth from the east, and at the instant a magical change spread over the superb picture. The dome of golden clouds dissolved in air; the dark sea assumed a green-bluish tinge, with white crests sparkling over the slightly agitated surface; and the hoary mountain range lost its savage ruggedness, clusters of trees and shrubs springing up

in the ridges of the grey cliffs, and their base getting clothed into one vast belt of verdure. The towering mass of rocks, I now perceived, did not fall down directly into the sea, but there was a strip of land between the shore and the cliffs, forming, it seemed, the Russian Switzerland of which Herr Ulrich had told me before.

Our friend and guide confirmed my surmise on my making inquiries, and while I was talking with him, Mike came down from the cart, rubbing his eyes. He appeared greatly astonished at the picture that burst upon him thus suddenly, after he had awoke from his slumbers, and I could not but think that he was lost as much in surprise of the beauties of nature as I had been.

"Don't you think the scenery magnificent, Mike?" I asked, contented to find somebody to share my admiration.

"Well, I don't know exactly whether it is magnificent," drawled out my comrade, still blinking so as to get the sleep from his eyes; "but I wonder how in the world we got to this place, in that rumbling old box, with the little nags. Did the gentry with the long spears whom we met on the road, and who seemed loth

to part company with us, help us up, by pushing behind ? ”

It had never struck me before, so much as now, how practical and sensible a man my friend Mike was ; and full of esteem for his reflective mind, I sat down with him on a piece of rock to explain the features of the road by which we had come. I had not quite finished, when he interrupted me, crying, “ Tush ! If I am not entirely mistaken, those rogues who stopped us are again at our heels.” He laid his ear on the ground, and listening a moment, exclaimed, “ No mistake, they are coming, but not quite so fast as before ; it’s up-hill work, to be sure.”

I immediately communicated the intelligence to Herr Ulrich, who appeared greatly alarmed at it, and telling us to take our places quickly, at once resumed his seat behind the horses. “ The Cossacks must have received new orders to follow us,” he half muttered between his teeth ; “ we must get away from them at any risk.” He swung his whip, and we rushed down the mountain at a break-neck pace.

For a few minutes, I could think of nothing but that we were flying into inevitable destruction.

The road, turning in sharp curves around the cliffs, was, except in a few places, not more than large enough for a single carriage, and moreover very uneven, strewn with stones, and made wet and slippery by mountain torrents; nevertheless our three ponies galloped along at full speed, at their heels the cumbrous waggon, swinging to and fro like a ship in a gale. It seemed against all human probability that we should reach the foot of the mountain alive, and I was about making a mental calculation as to how much farther we would get before being hurled over a precipice, when, to my infinite astonishment, I found that we had actually reached the bottom, or at least even ground. Swinging round a sharp corner, we passed into a narrow lane, overhung by rocks and trees, which ended in a dell having no visible outlet. Before we had got to the farthest part of it, our conductor drew up, sprang from the cart, and, putting his fingers to his lips in a peculiar manner, gave a shrill whistle. The sound had not yet died away, when there appeared close to us, like an apparition, an individual in Tartar dress, leaning against a gate which seemed to lead into a mountain cave. Herr Ulrich, without uttering a syllable, threw

the reins at him, and beckoning to Mike and me, made signs that we should follow where he went. We did so as quickly as possible, and the next moment, passing through the open gate, stood within a snug felt-carpeted chamber, very similar to the one where we had entered the evening before, and changed our habiliments.

"Sit down, and make yourselves comfortable," our guide exclaimed, stretching his arms; "we are all right now."

I was going to say something, when he lifted up his finger, crying "Still!" I listened, and heard with great distinctness the tramp of a troop of horse, passing apparently over our heads. The clatter of their hoofs continued for some minutes longer, till the sound of it got from near above to far below us, where it gradually died away. Once more we had escaped the Cossacks.

CHAPTER VII.

"The sea! the sea! the open sea!
The blue, the fresh, the ever free!
Without a mark, without a bound,
It runneth the earth's wide region round.
It plays with the clouds, it mocks the skies,
Or like a cradled creature lies."

BARRY CORNWALL.

MIKE was the first to break silence after we had finished listening to the tramp of our enemies.

"I say, this is an uncommonly nice place," he exclaimed, looking around him, and examining the thick carpet, the sofa running along the wall, piled with cushions, and the clean fireplace, where an iron kettle hung over a cheerful flame; "it's uncommonly nice, and I only wonder why on earth it's underground. The owner must be a sort of Robin Hood to hide after this fashion."

"What does your friend say?" inquired Herr Ulrich.

"He admires this little hut," I explained, "but

is puzzled to know why it is constructed so different from ordinary dwellings, being dug into the hill-side."

Our conductor gave a little laugh. "Tell your companion," he exclaimed, "that customs differ among different nations, and that the cottage we are in is built after the fashion that reigns in this part of the world. If you move along the coast here, you will find all the houses belonging to genuine natives constructed exactly after this pattern, either stuck into the ground, or leaning hard against a hill, or rock."

"What may be the reason," I asked, "for the people here building these kinds of houses?"

"Well now as to reason," Herr Ulrich cried, with another little laugh, "that's rather a ticklish question. I very much doubt whether folks, alone or in crowds, have always reasons for what they are accomplishing, or do not rather follow old habits that may have sprung up by accident. As far as I have been able to learn, the coastland here has suffered much from invasion, for a thousand years and longer, and it was natural, perhaps, that the natives of the country, not wishing to have their throats cut if they could help it, should

take a lesson from foxes and rabbits in designing their dwelling-places."

I was going to express my agreement with the surmise, but at the moment Herr Ulrich, who had been squatting on the ground, resting from the fatigues he had undergone, arose and went to the door. "I have to leave you alone for about an hour," he cried, "and you must promise me not to quit this place in the meanwhile on any account, as I am responsible for your safety. The man you saw at the door, who took charge of the cart, will give you something to eat before long, and the best you can do is to take a little rest afterwards, as there is still a long ride before us. Now will you promise me not to stir from here?"

I told our kind host that nothing was further from my mind than to disobey his injunctions, and then asked Mike to add his engagement to mine. He got quite angry at the request. "Sure and faith, Alec," he called out, "you don't think me such a fool as to leave these splendid quarters while the saucepan is on the fire! 'Pon my word, you're getting offensive."

Our German friend and protector appeared to

understand Mike, for he chuckled as the latter was pointing to the kettle that was merrily singing over the flames. "The more I see of your companion," he exclaimed, addressing me, "the more I like him; there's nothing like a man speaking frank from the liver." And, with a nod of the head, Herr Ulrich closed the door behind him.

A minute or two after he was gone, we heard the cart rolling away, and at the same moment the Tartar assistant came in. Scarcely giving us a look, he went to the fire-place, lifted off the steaming kettle, and placing it on a couple of bricks in front, proceeded to ladle the contents into a large earthenware dish. Mike sniffed in the odour with a thoughtful mien.

"I think it is milk porridge," he cried, visibly excited; "dear, dear, it's a long time since I tasted milk porridge."

Impatient as was my comrade to get his share of the coveted porridge, the Tartar did not bring us his dish at once, but throwing, very leisurely, the sleeves of his shirt over his shoulder, so as to leave his right arm bare, set to performing a variety of operations, the nature

of which I could not appreciate, but which had the result of spreading in an instant a most unpleasant smell through the room.

"Good gracious," cried Mike, springing to his feet, "the fellow is putting garlic into the broth!" And running up to the Tartar, he took him by the shoulders and pushed him into a corner, with such violence as nearly to make the walls of the hut shake.

I ran as quickly as I could to interfere, but had some trouble to pacify my comrade. He declared that he had been robbed of his breakfast, and for a moment seemed inclined to cudgel the unlucky cook, who, sitting on the floor, stared at him and me with distended eyes, evidently taking one, if not both, of us to be maniacs. To cure him of his error, and soften his wounded feelings, I executed a pantomimic play, trying to make him understand that the garlic soup he had been engaged in preparing for us did not agree with our tastes, and that we should be glad to have something else to eat.

While I was making signs, Mike, who had come to repent already his short fit of wrath, fumbled in his pockets, and in a moment brought

out a silver coin, which he pressed into the hand of the man he had assaulted. The latter turned it round and round, like a great curiosity, and having admired it sufficiently, ran out of the hut. He was back in a few minutes with a large loaf of bread and a jar of honey, which he placed on the floor in the middle of the room, and then withdrew with a deep courtesy.

"I shouldn't mind a drop of the same wine I had yesterday," said Mike, contemplating critically the new victuals which had made their appearance, "but I suppose wishing is no good, and I dare say it'll be best to take what we have got."

While satisfying the demands of hunger, my companion, who gradually got in a cheerful mood when he found that both the bread and honey were of excellent quality, gave me, in reply to my pressing inquiries, an account of the events that had taken place in the British camp subsequent to the Balaclava charge. I learnt for the first time that a furious fight, which some called the battle of Sebastopol, and others the battle of Inkerman, had taken place ten days after, and that the Russians had been routed with great

loss, abandoning some of their positions. But on further questioning my comrade, I elicited that the position of our army, notwithstanding the decisive victory, was held to be very critical. I learnt that the deaths from disease and privations continued at an increasing rate, the nights getting bitterly cold; and that the prospect of taking possession of the great fortress, so far from augmenting, appeared to decline from day to day, and week to week.

The conversation made me very sad, and Mike, too, did not seem to relish it, and made repeated attempts to cut it short, telling me that it was no good to talk about these matters. Showing himself more and more reluctant to answer my questions, we both got silent at last, and sat staring at each other, my own mind away from the actual scene, dwelling among the horrors on the bleak heights before Sebastopol.

The current of my melancholy thoughts was interrupted by a noise almost getting familiar to my ears, the clatter of the Cossack horse. I could hear, on listening attentively,—my heart beating a little faster than usual,—that the troop were returning on the road they had gone, but at

a very slow pace, and stopping at short intervals. Gradually they got nearer and nearer to us, till at last they reached what I fancied to be the point where we had turned off from the main road into the dell. Here they drew up once more, as it seemed to me, for an immense length of time. I expected every moment to hear the step of the Cossacks in front of our hut, and was considering whether it would be wise that we should barricade the door, when, to my great relief, the troop got in movement again. A few minutes more, and the measured clang, coming from above, proclaimed that our foes were trotting rapidly up-hill, to re-cross the mountain ridge.

I was yet listening to the last faint sounds overhead, when the door opened, letting in Herr Ulrich. He looked very grave, and without any other remark, at once called out "Are you ready?"

"What is the matter?" I inquired; but without giving a reply, our protector merely made sign with his hand to follow him, and immediately left the hut.

Mike, who appeared to understand the nature of the case better than I, was already on the

heels of Herr Ulrich, and hurrying after them, I saw both climb up the roof of the cottage that had given us shelter. I now understood how it had come to pass that our friend and conductor had returned with such mysterious suddenness, almost dropping into the hut, thus showing that the dell had another outlet than that by which we had come. It was with some difficulty I made my way to the top of the hut, densely covered with shrubs, but having arrived here, Mike took me by the hand, dragging me along a narrow footpath, in the wake of our guide.

We had great difficulty at first in breaking our way through a thick mass of shrubs with prickly leaves, and this obstacle having been passed, we got among filbert bushes, and in about five minutes found ourselves in an open clearing, in the middle of which stood our waggon with the three ponies. A wave of the hand of our conductor led us to get in quickly, and the next moment we rolled along a rough track cut through the woods, and sloping rather steeply downwards.

As we were getting on, I could hear, above the noise of our rumbling cart, a dull roar,

similar, as I fancied, to the booming of distant guns.

"Is there any shooting going on this side the mountains?" I inquired of our conductor.

"Not that I know of," he replied.

"Where, then, does this strange noise come from?" continued I.

"Why, my dear friend," cried Herr Ulrich, "you, native of an island of which every man is supposed to be a sailor, don't know the sea. Here! Look out!" We were turning a corner, our cart stopped, and before me, not more than a few feet distant, lay, outstretched in all its grandeur, the majestic ocean.

The spectacle, coming on a sudden, was startling to me, although I inwardly wondered why it should be so. Never before had the aspect of the sea, close to my feet, made such an impression upon my mind as at this moment. It was like meeting an old familiar friend, whose face I had not seen for a long time, and who was opening his arms to receive me with the warmest of greetings. Up to the moment, I had not been able to shake off the sense of being a prisoner in the hands of the Russians, liable at any

moment to be killed, or to be sent into Siberian slavery. But now, all at once, I felt as if my fetters were falling off, as if I could get free by merely touching the free ocean. Obeying a fantastic impulse of the moment, I sprang from the cart, dipped my hand into the sea, and sprinkled my forehead.

"What kind of ceremony is that you are performing?" asked Herr Ulrich.

"It was a sudden fancy," I replied, feeling as if I could blush a little.

He gave me a curious side-glance, and then cried, "You look pale, and have not had much rest lately: take a little wine."

"No, thank you," said I; but had no sooner spoken when Mike gave me a push with his elbow, evidently having caught the word wine. "Don't be a fool, Alec!" he cried, "a glass of wine would do you good, as I am sure it would me."

It was not necessary to repeat my comrade's hint to Herr Ulrich, for he had already taken a bottle from under his seat, and pouring the contents into a large metal cup, handed it to Mike. The latter took a long draught, and handing back the cup to our guide, returned

thanks by an expressive pantomime. "I am glad your companion appreciates the produce of my vineyards more than you do," said Herr Ulrich, with a smile; and then, giving the whip, we went off again at a rattling pace.

The road along which we were now travelling was broad and beautifully smooth, while the scenery all around was exquisitely picturesque, the sea, blue like the sky on a summer's day, lying close to our right, and the magnificent mountain range, clothed in verdure at the base, with its white summits half hidden by gossamer clouds, as close to our left.

While contemplating the glorious sights all around, and almost lost in their beauty, we had got round a curve of the winding road, when all on a sudden an extraordinary picture burst upon my eyes. Hemmed in by the sea on the one side, and a range of stupendous cliffs on the other, stood an edifice of enormous size, surmounted by countless towers, domes, and pinnacles, the summits of which glittered and glistened in the sun like masses of burnished gold. In its fantastic outlines, as well as gigantic proportions, the erection, standing in this

solitude, looked altogether as if dropped from the skies; it was evidently not a city, and seemed far too vast to be the residence of even a king, so that it perplexed the imagination to conjecture its origin and object. The nearer we came, the more wonderful appeared the structure before us, and unwilling though I was to break the silence of our conductor, who appeared absorbed in sombre thoughts, I could not restrain myself at last from asking him the name and nature of the strange edifice.

"Aloupka!" was all the reply I got, which left me as wise as before; and having given vent to this exclamation, Herr Ulrich shook his reins and whirled his whip in the air, making his team fly along at double speed. The next minute our cart rattled over a drawbridge, and through a massive gateway, coming to a standstill in a paved court-yard, overhung by frowning battlements.

It was clearly a fortress we were in; and alarmed at the sight, the thought instantly flashed through my mind that we had fallen into the hands of the enemy, within the walls of another dungeon. Mike seemed to harbour

the strangest suspicions, for he sprang up on his seat, as if going to take Herr Ulrich by the head. Before he could do so, however, both he and I were startled, and kept in mute surprise, by the sound of a voice, close to our cart, warbling forth a song in broad Scottish. It was a well-known old ditty that fell upon my ear:—

“Hie upon Hielands
And low upon Tay,
Bonnie George Campbell
Rode out on a day,
Saddled and bridled,
And gallant to see;
Hame cam’ his gude horse,
But ham’ came na he.”

“Guten Morgen, mein Herr Sinclair,” exclaimed our conductor, bending forward on his seat, “good morning, and may I speak to you for a moment?”

But the voice went on without heeding the interruption:—

“Out ran his auld mither,
Greeting fu’ sair,
Out ran his bonnie bride,
Reaving her hair.
He rade saddled and bridled,
Wi’ boots to the knee:
Hame cam’ his gude horse,
But never cam’ he.”

"Guten Morgen, mein Herr Sinclair," our guide repeated, shouting at the top of his voice; "Hören Sie! I wish to speak to you for a moment."

The singing now left off, and I heard a person come in front of the cart, with heavy steps, the clang of which re-echoed in the narrow courtyard. Next, a pair of keen grey eyes, shaded by a blue and red striped bonnet, fell upon me and my comrade with a piercing glance.

"A Scotchman, and no mistake," Mike whispered into my ear.

CHAPTER VIII.

"He knows the compass, sail, and oar,
Or never launches from the shore ;|
Before he builds, computes the cost,
And in no proud pursuit is lost."

GAY, *Fables*.

THERE could be no doubt that the man who looked at us was a native of Scotland, his voice, no less than dress and cast of features, proving the fact to demonstration. I could not but wonder at his sudden appearance in this neighbourhood, and he, too, kept his eye fixed with visible curiosity upon me and Mike, as if discovering at the instant that our faces were not in harmony with our dresses. However, our conductor did not allow much time for examination, but engaged him immediately in talk, which, as I perceived, not without some alarm, had reference to us.

"Can you give shelter under your hospitable roof to two countrymen of yours?" asked Herr

Ulrich in German, after some preliminary observations.

At the word "countrymen," the person in the striped bonnet gave a visible start, and darting another rapid glance at us, fell back a few steps. I now could see his face no more, and some little interval elapsed before his voice was heard. He began in German, asking who we were; but before he had finished his sentence, he went over to Russian, talking very fast, so that I could not understand a word he said. Herr Ulrich replied in the same, and an animated dialogue ensued which lasted for more than ten minutes. It was clear, from the tone of voice and the movements of the head of our German friend, that he was getting under much excitement as he went on speaking, till in the end his utterances were like shrieks, and he jumped up on his seat and whirled his whip in the air, as if to give vent to a violent fit of anger. After this, nothing more was said on either side; but there were heavy steps on the pavement, announcing, as the sound of them went farther and farther away, that the individual who had sung so blithely about bonnie George Campbell was retiring to a distance.

"Blitz Donnerwetter sacrament!" exclaimed Herr Ulrich, clacking his whip over the ponies, and letting it fall heavily upon them, so that they ran off at full gallop. We flew out of the narrow courtyard, opposite to the gate where we had entered, and passing at the foot of a high moated wall, overhung by curiously shaped cupolas, galleries, and battlements of green-coloured granite, came in the course of a few minutes again into the open road. Arrived here, I attempted to open conversation with our guide, curious to know something about the singular place we had passed through, and the person we had met, but for a little while could get no answer. It was not until we had rushed along a couple of miles, and the horses got tired, and slackened their speed, that I obtained at last the information I desired.

It was given by Herr Ulrich in the briefest manner. He told me that the enormous building within which we had halted, going by the name of Aloupka, was the residence and property of Prince Michael Woronzoff, governor-general of New Russia, and viceroy of the Caucasian provinces. The possessor of enormous wealth, Prince Woronzoff, I learnt, had built the unique palace I

had seen, half oriental and half mediæval in style, for the chief purpose of displaying his riches, and so far succeeded in the object he had in view as to spend between two and three millions of roubles upon it. The group of buildings, capacious enough to hold the population of a couple of small towns, according to Herr Ulrich, was not yet complete, and he thought the prince would have the satisfaction of spending another million or two before carrying out the whole of his grand design.

"And who was the person with whom you entered into conversation in the courtyard of the palace?" I inquired, after Herr Ulrich had sketched to me the origin and growth of Aloupka.

"Kreuz Donnerwetter!" he called out, and then checked himself. "It is a pity," he continued, in a softer tone, "that a man of my age should incur the sin of swearing, but really the conduct of that fellow is enough to drive one mad."

"What has he done to you?" I asked.

"Done to me? Why, what he has done is no less than to refuse me, one of his oldest friends, the favour of harbouring you and your comrade,

although I asked him very earnestly to do so, representing that you were in the greatest danger."

"But has he the right to admit any one into the palace?" continued I.

"Bah! You talk about right!" exclaimed Herr Ulrich; "I can tell you, mein Freund, that there is but one man in Russia who has any right to do anything: that man is the Emperor. As for the rest of us, we have only opportunities, which we may use or not, as we like, always leaving the risk that, whatever we may do, good or bad, we are liable at every instant to have a bullet put into our heads, or get a free pass to Siberia."

"Did you tell the gentleman we saw," I went on questioning, trying to soften the ire of our conductor, "that we were his countrymen?"

"Of course I did," Herr Ulrich replied, "and, what vexed me as much as anything, was that he did not even shake hands with you, or give you a single kind word. I am sure Prince Woronzoff himself, had he been there, would have acted otherwise, and not refused you shelter, even although the Cossack dogs had been within sight of Aloupka."

Our German friend went on talking in this

manner for some time, and from his remarks and exclamations I gathered that the noble owner of Aloupka had been brought up in England and had a great liking for Englishmen, which, it seemed, the existing war had not altered. The stupendous edifice through which we had passed was erected, I was told, after the designs of an English architect, while nearly all the places of trust in the establishment kept up there were given to natives of Great Britain. One of these was the person I had seen, who acted as chief steward, holding, in the absence of Prince Woronzoff and his family from Aloupka, virtual command over the estate. The poor man, always spoken of as "Herr Sinclair," was evidently not possessed of the courage of either Dr. Schwartz, or our stout-hearted conductor, and had slunk away for fear to compromise himself. Finding out this much, and that, though unwilling to help, he was not likely to betray us, I dropped the matter, bringing the conversation to an end.

Our road, for the next hour or two, lay through the most magnificent scenery. A succession of superb mansions, and of beautiful country houses, was to our right, with the blue sea beyond, while

the hoary mountain range, topping the clouds, its base covered with the most luxurious vegetation, was stretching out to the left. Herr Ulrich did not speak much, but pointed out to me the principal places we passed, giving the names of their owners, with a few other particulars.

The first that caught my attention was a superb edifice close to the shore, half hidden in a mantle of flowers and evergreens. It belonged, I was informed, to General Narishkin, but was in the temporary possession of one of the Imperial arch-duchesses. Almost opposite to it, on the mountain slope, there was a singular-looking gilded dome, with a colossal cross on the summit.

"Is that a church?" I inquired of our guide.

"Oh, dear no!" he answered, shaking his head; "it is something very different, namely, a tombstone, or, I should say, a monument, put up to a mad woman, called Madam Krudener, who died in this neighbourhood thirty years ago. You may have heard of her, as in her time she played all sorts of pranks with a knot of emperors and kings, who, I dare say, were as mad as she."

I confessed that I had read about the singular person, original founder and promoter of the

famous Holy Alliance; and curious to learn something more concerning her and her gilded monument, I was going to make inquiries, when my attention was diverted by a picture of extraordinary novelty. While going up a rather steep hill, there came right towards us a string of rude carts drawn by two-hunched camels of strange shape, the bump nearest the head falling over on one side, like a lump of fat, and a long soft mane hanging down from under the neck, to the knees of the fore feet.

The sight of the camels, of the existence of which in these regions I was unaware, transported me for the moment into the Orient, but I could not remain there long, for new scenes, one more striking than the other, continued to start up as we advanced. Still going up-hill, and having reached a considerable eminence, we saw at our feet to the right a vast pile of buildings, hemmed in on one side by the sea, and on the other by a perpendicular range of white cliffs, glaring in the hot sun rays.

“There is the palace of Great Orianda, the property and intended residence of his Majesty, the Emperor,” exclaimed Herr Ulrich; “the build-

ing, constructed after English designs, was commenced some ten years ago, but like many things in Russia, remains unfinished."

"It seems the English have been very busy here in the Crimea?" I remarked.

"Yes, your people have left their footmarks here—it was an Englishman, too, who designed Sebastopol," drily remarked our conductor, with just the least perceptible laugh.

I was very glad to see our German friend get again into good humour, even though a little satirical, and taking advantage of his seeming inclination to be somewhat more communicative, I asked how far his plans regarding our safety had been altered by the refusal of our countryman to give us shelter within the walls of Aloupka.

"There has been no alteration of plan," Herr Ulrich replied, with some apparent surprise. He then went on to tell me that he had intended from the first, according to the arrangement made with Dr. Schwartz, when the latter had persuaded him to assist in our escape from prison, to take us to his own home, the village of Friedenthal, and that all that he had meant, in requesting the

steward at Aloupka to give us the protection of the walls of Prince Woronzoff's domain, was to leave us there for a couple of days, in order to elude the hot pursuit of the Cossacks.

"Did you not expect that we would be pursued as soon as our flight was known?" asked I.

"Not in the least!" was the quick reply; "neither I nor Dr. Schwartz calculated upon the possibility of such a thing. I thought, and so did my friend, that the Cossacks had more important work to do at this moment than hunting after single prisoners the length and breadth of the land. Besides, we held the protection of Prince Labanoff to be fully sufficient to stay immediate pursuit, as he is an intimate friend of General Gortshakoff, the commanding officer within the district in which you were a prisoner."

"Did then the Cossacks that stopped us on the road not come under the authority of the general whom you mention?" I inquired, much surprised at the disclosure.

"No, they did not," Herr Ulrich replied; "and that is the puzzle to me, and a matter which makes me very anxious regarding your safety. The officer of the troop we met last night, which

was identical, as I found out, with that following so sharp at our heels early this morning, was acting under a special order of General Liprandi, and directly in search of you and your comrade."

"Can you tell me how it happened, under the circumstances, that he let us slip at first, and was again in pursuit of us a few hours after?" I asked, more and more astonished at what I learnt.

"I cannot explain it otherwise," exclaimed our friend, speaking with slow thoughtfulness, "than on the supposition that, in the first instance, the bearer of General Liprandi's instructions was doubtful whether you were the men he was in search of, and that, in his hesitation, and aware of the fact that he was upon territory over which his commanding officer held no sway, he preferred, to prevent getting into trouble through overmuch zeal, to have his orders properly endorsed by General Gortshakoff. The latter, as is well known to every soldier in the Russian army, is a bitter foe of Liprandi, and it was this, very probably, which acted as another strong inducement upon the Cossack officer to return and get his papers into strict order."

"So you think," said I, "that after letting us

go last night, he rode back to the head-quarters of General Gortshakoff, obtained an endorsement of his warrant, which could not well be refused, and then set out anew upon his chase, determined to lay hold of us this time?"

"That is exactly what I have come to believe," cried Herr Ulrich; "though, what I cannot account for, is the extraordinary energy displayed by General Liprandi to seize you. The general, I am certain, has a great deal of work on hand just now, and would not set a troop of Cossacks hunting after you without special reasons."

I could not help feeling somewhat alarmed at what I heard, and slightly sorry that the steward of Aloupka had not shown a little of old Scottish hospitality to a couple of unfortunate countrymen. Musing upon the state of our affairs, I went to inquire of our German friend, whose noble intrepidity had come to impress me deeply, whether he thought our pursuers had given up the search after us.

"I am afraid not," was the answer; "these Cossacks are just like wolves, alternately retreating and advancing, but never content till they have hunted down their prey."

We reached at this moment the top of the road we had been climbing for some time, and having given vent to his unhappy prognostication, Herr Ulrich raised himself on his seat, and, stretching his head from the carriage, looked behind. An exclamation of intense alarm instantly broke from his lips.

"Du grosser Gott," he exclaimed, "there they are again!"

He did not utter another word, and I fancied for a moment that he was dropping his reins. In breathless excitement, I looked out of the side window, and beheld the troop of Cossacks behind us, at the foot of the hill, at a distance of barely two miles. Drawing back my head, I felt a violent jerk, caused, as I at once perceived, by the movement of our horses, who were setting out in full gallop. Herr Ulrich had quitted his seat and was standing upright, urging his active ponies, with whip and word, to the utmost exertion of which they were capable.

We flew along at a rate almost surpassing that with which we had come down from the mountains in the early morning. I could scarcely distinguish objects on the road, and only knew

that we were going down-hill towards what seemed to be a town, or large village, lying on a flat piece of ground, between the sea and a circle of precipitous white cliffs. The whole of the dwellings looked exceedingly neat and well-built, having very much the appearance of English country houses; but before I had time to examine anything, we swung off the road to the right, making straight for the sea.

The purpose of our valiant German friend now began to dawn upon me. It was evidently hopeless to escape the Cossacks in our lumbering cart, and the only chance of getting beyond the reach of their nimble-footed steeds was that we should leave the land and take to the waste of waters outspread before us. There was not a minute to lose, for already the shouts of our pursuers, who had evidently got sight of us, as we of them, came ringing on our ears from behind.

But the next moment we had reached the shore, drawing up close to the margin of a small harbour, with several boats moored along the side.

"Make haste, and follow me!" cried Herr Ulrich, who had sprung from the cart almost

before it stopped, and was throwing a searching eye over the boats. A second after, he had leaped down into one of them, and before he had unfastened the chain which bound it to the land, we were at his side.

“Take to the oars,” he cried, in commanding voice; “I will steer!” and Mike and I grasped the flat poles in the bottom of the boat, swung them over the side, and rowed away with all our strength.

Before we had got a cable length from the shore, a shower of bullets whistled over our boat, and lifting up our eyes, we saw the troop of Cossacks galloping full speed towards the harbour. “There are the wolves!” shouted Herr Ulrich; “but, thank God, wolves dislike water.”

CHAPTER IX.

"With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who, pursued with yell and blow,
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forwards bends his head:
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled."

COLERIDGE, *The Ancient Mariner*.

THE first discharge of bullets was rapidly succeeded by a second, equally harmless to us, and the next moment we saw the Cossacks reach the margin of the sea and dismount.

Terrible as was our situation, neither Mike nor I could help laughing at the scene which now followed. Ordered, by frantic movements of their commanding officer, to get into the boats that were lying in the harbour, and keep up the pursuit after us, the fellows that had only a few minutes before been so warlike in their saddles, slunk about like a pack of half-starved dogs, one creeping behind the other, and all evidently

in frightful awe of the watery element. The amusing pantomime continued for a minute or two, when we beheld the officer seizing a whip and laying it most freely and energetically on the backs of his men.

The encouragement thus afforded made about half a dozen Cossacks slip into as many boats, and make an attempt to undo the chains, in which, however, they were altogether unsuccessful. Others of their comrades followed, but even the superior whipping the latter had got by remaining longer on shore had not taught them nautical skill, and it was not till some Tartars came up, assisting, as it appeared under compulsion, that at last the boats were got off, ready to give us chase.

We had pushed nearly a mile out to sea by the time the boats of our pursuers left the harbour, and a few minutes more served to show us that we need not be under the least apprehension of being overtaken by them. It was evident that the men at the oars could not row, for the boats kept spinning about, and pushing against each other, in the wildest manner, little fitted to increase the affection of the Cossacks for the sea.

"I don't see why we should pull quite so hard," Mike cried out at last, having looked with curious eye upon the gyrations of our foes; "those old humbugs there no more think of following us than of flying." I thought my companion was right, and drew in my oar, but was immediately taken to account for it by Herr Ulrich.

"Are you so tired as not to be able to row any longer?" he asked, rather sharply; and, seeing that I did not answer at once, added, "If so, give me the oar, and take the helm."

I protested that I felt little tired, and only meant to rest for a minute, as we were out of danger; but he would not listen to the argument.

"You are mistaken if you believe you are out of danger," he cried; "for though these Cossacks are no better than leaden geese upon the water, it does not follow that they will not be able to find people who are as good sailors as we are, to do their work."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What I mean," exclaimed Herr Ulrich, his brows gathering in a slight frown, "is, that the

town yonder, which is called Yalta, has among its inhabitants a dozen or two of fishermen, who may be induced, by force of bribes, or the knout, or both combined, to try to catch us in their nets."

There was a short pause. "See!" continued our friend; "there is a movement visible on shore already, and I doubt little but that some of the seafaring people are put into requisition by the Cossacks." The sentence was scarcely finished when a sail rose up in one of the boats we had been watching, and slowly moved from the harbour.

"Our rowing won't quite do now," ejaculated Mike, "we must use all we have got. Lend a hand, Alec!" And grasping the mast lying at the bottom of our little craft, he stuck it in its place, after which we both set to unfurling the sail, which seemed in very good condition.

"Now I feel really comfortable," my comrade exclaimed, "I have had many a long sail on Belfast Lough and Dundrum Bay, and fancy the Black Sea is quite as pretty as the Irish Sea."

I did not feel any inclination to chime in with the sentiments of Mike, as it appeared to me that

we were in a very critical position, offering but little cause for rejoicing. As yet I had no idea where we were going to, nor was I able to imagine in what manner we could escape from our enemies, as it seemed certain that they would dog our movements if returning on shore, while on the other hand, there was an almost impossibility to sail across the Black Sea in our frail boat, even if it had been desirable for us to land in Paphlagonia, the Pontes, or at the foot of the Caucasian mountains.

"Whither are we directing our course?" I asked at last our guide, who stood upright at the helm, lost in sombre thoughts.

Some minutes elapsed before I got an answer. "There are two chances for us, and only two," he murmured, more as if speaking to himself than to me; "the first is, that we reach the Crimean lowlands beyond Kaffa, where, I believe, there are no troops at present; and the second, that we are picked up by some English, French, or Turkish vessel." "I do not know," he continued musingly, "that the former would be very difficult, though I should prefer the latter for you."

While saying this, Herr Ulrich slowly turned

his head round, and contracting his eyes, as if to see more distinctly, swept the sea at our rear. "There are two vessels giving chase now," he exclaimed, still as if speaking to himself; "the second has just left the harbour."

I had watched the first boat for some time, not at all alarmed at its movements, as it seemed to make but very little headway; and its successor, now pointed out, I could scarcely see, as it was a mere speck on the waters. For some time past, and soon after we had got a couple of miles from shore, the sea, originally calm like a lake, had assumed a ruffled surface, while a sort of white mist was settling towards the land, preventing a distinct view of objects in that direction. I thought it fortunate, and told our helmsman so, but he shook his head, looking more serious than ever.

"There's an ugly storm brewing, I'm afraid," said he, after a little pause; "the white mist and little black clouds that come running from behind and to our right appear to me much fuller of danger to us than the two Yalta vessels in our track." "The second is a fast sailer, though," he added, having given another keen glance

behind ; "see how she is cutting through the waves !"

My eyes followed the direction given, and I could distinctly see now the new boat that had left the shore. It was considerably larger than ours, with two masts and sails, and, shooting over the water like an arrow, was clearly gaining upon us. While watching it intently, I on a sudden began to feel the touch of a strong swell from the south-west, which made our craft rise and fall in a very peculiar manner. At the same time, the sea in the distance, to our right and in front of us, showed long streaks of foam, sparkling and glittering like snow in the sun.

"We shall have the tempest upon us in less than half an hour," cried Herr Ulrich, "and I really think we dare not go out further to sea." "What is your opinion ?" he added inquiringly, addressing me.

I confessed that, although possessed of little nautical experience, I had a strong impression that a gale was rising in the south-west, which we should scarce be able to face. I was yet speaking, when all at once the sun, which had been shining bright the moment before, got

hidden under thick clouds, and masses of dark vapour spread like a funeral pall over the western horizon.

"We must veer about, whatever may happen," exclaimed our helmsman. And leaning backward with his full weight, he turned the rudder, instantly changing the course of our boat from the south-east to nearly due north.

Running before the wind, which was every minute increasing in force, our boat flew along now at a high speed, nearly parallel with the shore, the outlines of which were getting dimmer and dimmer in the mist. Yet though darkness was sinking fast upon the face of the stormy waters, behind as well as to our left, we could see very distinctly the boat that was racing after us, its two white sails standing out prominently against the dark sky and rocks. It was evident that our pursuers had altered their course as soon as they perceived that we had changed ours, and that they were trying to intercept us at a short angle.

Mike and I had laid down our oars for some time, but we now both simultaneously took them up again, without speaking a word to each other. Our eyes expressed all we felt, and a single

glance at my comrade, with another at our guide, told me that we need spend no more words to carry on the awful struggle for life in which we were engaged.

Rowing with might and main, and watching alternately the sky, the sea, and the flying ship of our enemies, we passed the next quarter of an hour, doubtful whether we had most to fear from the elements or from the living men. Our pursuers were gaining more and more upon us; but the storm as well was coming nigher and nigher, the hissing gale rushing over us in tremendous fury, while the upheaved waves were lifting our little boat one moment high on the top of foam-crested mountains, and throwing it down the next into dark watery abysses.

All at once, above the roar of wind and waves, I heard a shout not far off, and turning round beheld the boat of our enemies not much above a hundred yards off to our left. There were more than a dozen men in it, about one-half of whom appeared to be mariners, and the others soldiers, as far as I could see, Cossacks. Most of the latter were kneeling against the vessel's side, with their guns stretched forth, as if ready to fire at any

moment, and only awaiting the word of command. The distance between them and us was lessened the next minute by a turn which their boat seemed to make, bringing the prow more directly towards ours. But immediately after there followed a crash, and one of their sails dipped into the sea, the mast breaking at the bottom like a reed.

I looked at our helmsman the very instant. He, too, had seen the accident that had befallen our foes, and a grim smile of satisfaction flew over his countenance. Nodding his head towards me and Mike, as a sign to be watchful, he leaned back as he had done before, grasping the rudder with both his hands, and giving it another turn. I felt a tremor come over me in perceiving that we stood right in upon the rocky shore.

Astonishment for a moment allowed me neither to speak nor to look around, the consciousness that we were rushing into certain death overweighing all other feelings. However, Mike, who seemed not less surprised than I at the action of our pilot, drew in his oar, shouting at him, "What does this mean? What are you doing?"

For all reply, Herr Ulrich pointed over his

shoulder with his left hand, directing Mike's and my attention to the spot where we had last seen the Cossack boat. I looked, and beheld an extraordinary scene. The whole crew of the boat, soldiers and sailors, were standing upright, staring after us, apparently lost in utter amazement at what they saw us doing, and entirely irresolute what they should do themselves.

When veering round, we had been passing under the bow of the Cossack boat, not more than two score yards from it; but our pursuers as yet had not altered their course, but continued it in the old direction, getting gradually from our left to our right side. However, the next moment a stir became visible among them, as if a violent altercation was taking place. It was not difficult to guess that our foes were quarrelling among themselves, some wishing to keep up the pursuit, and others opposing a design fraught with such imminent danger.

The division of opinions, if such it was, did not last long, for after turning away my eyes for a second and then looking back to the right, I saw the boat of our enemies tacking round and shaping its course after ours. An exclamation of mingled

wonder and alarm broke at the same instant from the lips of our German friend.

"Gott sei bey uns," he exclaimed, "may heaven guard and protect us!"

A stroke of lightning, coming down with fearful vividness from the dark sky, accompanied the words, and almost involuntarily I crouched down in the boat, Mike following my example. The next minute we were thrown on to the top of an immense wave, and looking forward I saw that we had got quite close to the shore. Though partly hidden in mist and clouds, I could see that the white cliffs were rising up almost perpendicularly, the surf dashing against them with a hollow, quavering groan.

For another minute or two, I could perceive nothing through the mass of spray that was flying about. Then I was blinded by a new flash of lightning, and, at the same moment, felt as if thrown up high into the air. Everything seemed to circle round me, and, unable to open my eyes, I could only stretch out my hand to feel where I was.

The first object I touched was the face of Mike, and, groping about, I became conscious that we

were still in the boat, which appeared to be no more on the sea but on firm land. Lying quiet for half a minute I got strength to shake off the stupor into which I had fallen, so that I could raise myself up and look about. Mike was at my feet, and Herr Ulrich close to him, seemingly lifeless. But while I stared at them, a cold shudder creeping all over me, they raised themselves slowly on hands and feet as I had done.

For a second or two we looked at each other, like men not fully awake. Then Herr Ulrich rushed towards me and Mike, throwing his arms around both of us, and calling out, "Saved ! Saved !"

As yet, I could scarcely realise our situation. But gradually waking to a sense of it, I perceived that our boat had been guided by what seemed to be, under the circumstances, marvellous skill and judgment, aside of the towering cliffs, into a tiny haven, formed by a brook, in which it was now lying half shattered, the flapping sail beating the ground.

"Where are our pursuers ?" I asked our dauntless friend and protector.

Herr Ulrich stretched forth his arm and pointed

to a spot a little distance from the shore, marked by a circle of black rocks, slightly above the foam-covered surf. Something seemed to be moving among the rocks; and, straining my eyes to pierce the spray that was flying around us, I saw a mast-head sticking up.

"Have all perished?" I asked, with trembling voice.

"All!" replied Herr Ulrich, folding his hands as in prayer, "and may God have mercy upon their souls!"

CHAPTER X.

"A mighty wind:

Not like the fitful blast, with fury blind,
But deep, majestic, in its destined course,
Sprung with unerring, unrelenting force
From the bright east. Tides duly ebb'd and flow'd,
Stars rose and set, and new horizons glow'd,
Yet still it blew! As with primeval sway,
Still did its ample spirit, night and day,
Move on the waters."

SAMUEL ROGERS.

I WAS turning round once more to look upon the black circle of rocks, attracted thither by a strange kind of fascination; but at the moment another flash of forked lightning flew through the air, accompanied by a roll of thunder that seemed to shake the very mountains.

"We must be gone," cried Herr Ulrich, taking me by the arm, and making a sign to Mike to imitate his example. Assisted by my two companions, and exerting my own remaining strength to the utmost, I clambered up the steep cliffs,

using both hands and feet, and groping more than seeing my way.

Before we had got far on our dangerous road, the rain began to pour down in torrents, and beaten by the furious gale, I expected every instant to be cast backward into the raging surf. Not being able to lay hold of anything, the loose, wet limestone under me giving way at the first touch, I found at the end of a few minutes that I could creep no further, overcome by extreme exhaustion.

"Leave me here, and get on by yourself," I whispered to Mike; "you may fetch me as soon as you have found some place of shelter."

For all reply, my comrade threw his arms round my body, and lifting me up as if I had been an infant, carried me along. I felt so weak as scarce able to speak, and had to submit to be a burthen, silently wondering at the gigantic strength of my companion. It was evident, however, that, powerful as he was, he would not be able to transport me more than a short distance; and I felt heartily glad when, having got some fifty yards higher up, we reached a flat piece of ground, scooped out of the chalk and

overhung by thick shrubs, which offered some shelter against the beating rain.

Mike sat down without saying a word; and seeing his whole body tremble from the immense exertion he had made, I crept to the other end of the little cave, determined that he should carry me no further. He uttered a subdued growl, but at that moment Herr Ulrich, who had got a few paces ahead of us, returned, and sat down between me and my comrade.

"I had quite forgotten," he cried, with a look of satisfaction, "that I have got something in my pocket the taste of which will do us all good." And he drew from his pocket a small flask, which he handed to me. I passed it on to Mike, who took a long draught, his eyes expressing extreme content.

"There's nothing better on earth we could have had at this moment," he exclaimed; "sure, it's the finest brandy I ever tasted. There, take your share, Alec."

My first inclination was to refuse; but, urged on both by my comrade and Herr Ulrich, the latter making mien to be angry with me, I put the flask to my mouth.

The stimulant was more effective than I expected, and I began to feel an almost immediate accession of strength, which made me desirous, at the end of a few minutes, to continue on our journey. My companions were anxious to do so, and taking me again by the arm, we set out anew on our uphill scramble. The fury of the gale seemed to increase with every step we went, and having climbed another hundred yards, I was feeling as if my forces were again abandoning me, when Herr Ulrich, with a sudden jerk, pulled me a little way upwards.

I was surprised to find myself standing on a narrow ledge of rock, sloping down precipitously on three sides, with a small but impetuous mountain torrent dashing close by us.

"We must cross this stream," exclaimed our guide, "and then we shall have not much further to go." So saying, he took a leap, and alighted at the other side of the torrent, close to a stunted juniper tree. The next moment I saw him breaking off the largest branch, which he threw over to Mike, retaining one end of it in his hand.

"Now you hold tight, to let our invalid cross

the stream," our guide shouted. He was at once obeyed by my comrade, who, though ignorant of the language spoken, seemed to understand fully what was wanted. The handrail having been formed, I waded across the torrent, which threatened every moment to throw me down, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I reached the opposite bank.

Mike, strong as he was, could not leap nearly so well as Herr Ulrich, and on attempting to jump over the stream, fell partly into it. But we got him to his feet in a moment, and then continued our road, which now had become comparatively easy, being not very steep, and covered in part with brushwood.

Some ten minutes brought us to what appeared to be an abandoned limestone quarry, which we had no sooner reached, when our guide cried out, "Thank God, we have gained our harbour at last."

I looked about in astonishment, not seeing anywhere the least indication of a place fit to serve us as harbour, even if it was meant to be only a crevice among the rocks. My surprise did not diminish on Herr Ulrich taking me by the hand

and drawing me towards a rock at one end of the quarry, covered from top to bottom by a profusion of creeping plants. Pushing some of them aside, I perceived a hole about three feet square, into which my guide crept with bended body, crying out, "Follow me!"

Doing as ordered, I found myself the next moment in a small room, almost dark, with a half-opened door opposite to the entrance by which I had come. I was irresolute for an instant what to do, when the hand of our guide was stretched forth from the door, beckoning me and Mike forward, the latter following close at my heels.

For a moment, I did not know whether I was waking or dreaming on beholding the sight that met my eyes when I passed the door. I had expected to get into a rough and damp natural cave, and was amazed to find myself in a beautiful little apartment, a perfect paradise of comfort and luxuriousness. It was a chamber deliciously warm and cozy, with a small window that let in a feeble light, at one end, and a large fire-place containing a flaming log of wood, at the other. The floor, to the very edge of the

fire-place, was carpeted with thick white felt, while a divan, about six inches high, on which pillows were heaped, ran all along the walls, overhung by quantities of richly embroidered cloths, on which gold and silver were displayed in profusion.

The contrast of all this luxury with the strange entrance through which we had passed, and the terrors of the storm from which we had barely escaped, the howling of which could still be distinctly heard, was so great, that for a moment both Mike and I were lost in surprise, and it was only after repeated injunctions of Herr Ulrich that we took off our wet garments, and wrapping ourselves in ready blankets stretched out on the divan nearest the fire.

We had scarcely done so when a small door opposite to us, of the existence of which I had been quite unaware, was thrown open, and an old man in Tartar dress entered the room. Making a profound bow before our German friend, but taking not the least notice of me and Mike, the old man at once squatted down before the fire, and hanging a kettle which appeared to contain meat over it, fanned the flame to make

the water boil. He then took a large brass urn from a shelf, threw a handful of tea into the funnel on the top, and lighted some charcoal at the bottom.

I watched the whole of the proceedings in a state of blissful contentment. The storm of the elements without seemed to heighten to an immense degree the sense of the comforts we were enjoying within, and as I stretched my limbs on the soft divan, with eyes half shut, I felt in a mood to believe that Mike and I had got, not into an ordinary Tartar cottage, but to some enchanted dwelling, kept by Crimean mountain fairies for the special accommodation of shipwrecked British Lancers.

My eyes were on the point of closing, shutting out the waking dreams, when the old man who had undertaken the functions of cook brought me a cup of delicious tea. It was followed by a piece of tenderly boiled mutton, with bread equally good, after which came another allowance of tea, served in the tiniest of filigree cups. Having taken it, and seen by a lazy glance that both my comrade and Herr Ulrich were preparing to take their night's rest, although the

daylight was still streaming in through the narrow latticed window opposite the fire-place, I turned round on my couch, and a minute after was fast asleep.

My rest was of the soundest, and not disturbed till after daybreak the next morning, when I was roused by a hearty shake, and at the same time heard the deep bass of Herr Ulrich's voice. "I am sorry to disturb your slumbers," he cried; "but we must be off: there is not a minute to lose."

Looking around, I beheld the old man squatting before the burning logs, in exactly the position I saw him before I went to sleep; the same kettle was hanging over the same fire, and the same tea-urn, with lighted charcoal underneath, stood on the floor in front. I began rubbing my eyes, not sure that I was quite awake; when Herr Ulrich gave me another shake.

"For heaven's sake, do not tarry," he cried; "we must be gone the very instant!"

I was dressed in a minute, and the next, having swallowed a hasty cup of tea, made my way through the dark ante-chamber and the narrow hole at the entrance, into the open air.

It had left off raining, but the gale was blowing more fiercely than ever, a strange sound, a hissing, and moaning, and roaring, such as I had never heard in my life, creeping along the face of the mountains.

"A stiffish gale, but it'll blow harder by-and-bye!" cried Herr Ulrich, as we made our way across the open piece of ground, looking like a quarry, in front of the invisible cottage in which we had spent the night. "We must hasten," he added, "to get under shelter."

I could not help expressing my astonishment at the remark of our friend, and ventured to say that it seemed all but impossible the gale should become much more violent than it was already.

"You will soon learn something new, then, in respect to the violence of the winds in this part of the world," Herr Ulrich exclaimed, pushing forward in long strides. "I may tell you at once that we have three kinds of storms, or hurricanes, on this coast, designated by the people as the Miatjel, the Samet, and the Wiuga. Probably the Miatjel, which is said to occur once in seven years, is equal to the fiercest gale with which you are acquainted; of the next, the Samet, believed

to break loose once in fourteen years, you can have no idea ; and as for the Wiuga, raging once every twenty-one years, even the natives here who burrow in the ground like moles, speak with a shudder."

"The old man we just left," our guide continued, "believes there will be a Wiuga before the day is over, and in anticipation of it is trembling already in every limb." At this moment we turned a corner, when all at once I received a stroke as from a heavy club, which pushed me right against Mike, who with difficulty kept on his feet. My first thought was that we had fallen into an ambush, and were being attacked by Cossacks, or robbers, but turning round I came to feel that there was no other foe but the gale.

"You have a foretaste, however slight, of what is coming," cried Herr Ulrich, bending low under an overhanging rock, and entering upon a new path leading steeply upwards. "Our walk will not be long, yet we must be very careful," he added, "and you had better give me your hand."

I did as desired, and we proceeded on our road, which was sheltered against the wind by a belt of thick brushwood, for about a quarter of a mile, when we came to a more exposed part of

the mountain. The first gush of the wind nearly threw me down, and to save myself from falling, I let go the arm of my guide, and crawled along on hand and feet. Mike did the same, but our guide kept marching upright, cheering us on from time to time by a word of encouragement.

Another quarter of a mile brought us to a ravine, which again offered some shelter against the wind. But the previous exertion had exhausted me so much that I felt as if all my wounds were breaking open, so that I had to beg Herr Ulrich to allow me a few minutes' rest. But he would not hear of it.

"We dare not stop an instant," he cried, "or we are lost. Come on, im Himmel's Namen!" And grasping me by the arm, while motioning to Mike to follow close behind, he drew me forward, up the ravine, and once more over a piece of exposed ground. Here the force of the gale was so terrible that for a moment it quite uplifted both me and Herr Ulrich, and I was thinking that nothing could save us being thrown off the mountain, when I saw him lay hold of a huge stone, and quickly whirl himself round it, dragging me after.

We stood completely sheltered now, under a wide overhanging ledge of rock, before what appeared a narrow excavation in the limestone. My first thought, on finding myself in security, was of Mike, and, glancing round the corner of the rock, I was horror-struck to see him turn head over, and roll down-hill. But the very instant our guide sprang forward, and laying hold of him as he had of me, dragged him, with what appeared almost superhuman strength, close to my side.

"Now wait a moment, stand quiet, and follow me when I call," exclaimed our friend and preserver, and throwing himself on the ground, he crept forward on hand and feet into the narrow hole I had before noticed. We lost sight of him for a minute, and next saw him strike fire with flint and steel, and set light to a candle, enclosed in a horn lantern. This done, he shouted loudly for us to come up, and, obeying the behest, we crawled along, I going first, and Mike close to my heels.

The narrow tunnel in which we were gradually widened, and having advanced some twenty yards, I saw the lantern that had been my guide resting on the ground, and Herr Ulrich standing upright

against a piece of rock, at one side of a spacious cavern. Glad to be able to get off our knees, Mike and I arose quickly, and we both set to inspect the strange apartment into which we had been led.

The first objects that attracted my attention were several rows of bones, piled up in regular heaps against the walls, and forming rather fantastic groups.

"From what animals do all these bones come?" I asked our guide.

"These are not the bones of animals, but of human beings," he replied, very quietly, "belonging, while clothed with flesh, some centuries ago, to soldiers despatched by the republic of Genoa for the task of conquering the Crimea. During a hurricane such as that which is now raging, the Italian warriors took refuge in this cavern, whereupon the natives, to get rid of them in the simplest and most expeditious manner, lighted a fire at the entrance."

I could not prevent a shudder, looking again at the piles of human remains close to me, upon which, perceiving the movement, Herr Ulrich went on, in consoling tone, "Never mind, mein

lieber Freund, the old Genoese bones are very useful to us, being the safest protection we could possibly have against our enemies the Cossacks, who, full of superstition, dare not even come near this place, said to be haunted, and known generally as the Cave of the Foul Kouba. Moreover, I can assure you, there is not within a hundred miles so good a shelter against the storm as our present retreat."

"The Wiuga is getting up; just look and see what he is doing!" cried our guide, after a moment's pause. I raised my eyes, looking the way we had come, and beheld huge masses of rock interspersed with tall trunks of trees flying along in front of the cavern.

"It is terrible!" muttered Mike, coming close to me, and laying his hand on my shoulder; "What will become of our poor fellows in the camp before Sebastopol?"

CHAPTER XI.

“Es freue sich

Wer da athmet im rosigen Licht !

Da unten aber ist's fürchterlich ;

Und der Mensch versuche die Götter nicht,

Und begehre nimmer und nimmer zu schauen

Was sie gnädig bedecken mit Nacht und Grauen.”

SCHILLER, *Der Taucher*. }

MIKE's words started a train of reflections on the sufferings which our comrades would have to endure, in addition to all the others which bore them down, in this frightful tempest, and the thought of the probable state of things in our camp so fully occupied my mind that for a moment I did not hear the voice of Herr Ulrich.

“You seem deeply absorbed in reflections,” he exclaimed at last, coming near to me; “I hope it is not because you are under apprehensions as to your safety?”

I hastened to assure our friend that I felt not the least fear about myself, but was thinking

of others, upon which he took me by the arm, and drew me along, crying out, with a strange sort of energy, "There you are wrong; it is no good to indulge in meditation, unless it leads to action of some kind or other." "And you can't accomplish much in that way just now," he added, with an exclamation half like a grunt and half like a laugh, "for the Wiuga does all the acting exclusively for the moment."

We were walking on while Herr Ulrich uttered these words, I close at his side, and Mike in the rear. Throwing back a glance, I noticed that the entrance to the cavern in which we were had entirely disappeared from view, our road sloping downward, and widening gradually both in height and breadth.

"How do you like our residence?" our guide exclaimed on a sudden, when we had advanced about a hundred yards from the spot where we had first stopped. Asking the question, he opened his lantern, and held it high up in the air.

I felt as if transfixed to the ground by the extraordinary scene that burst upon me. All around, as far as I could see in the dim light, there stood pillars, columns, and towers, upholding a dome of

great height, and cast in the most varied and picturesque forms, while the whole was dyed in colours of magical hue, almost outvying the tints of the rainbow. I knew at once that the objects I beheld were huge basaltic columns, overhung by stalactites; nevertheless the sight appeared to me all but unearthly in its bewildering beauty, and it took some minutes before I could recover from my surprise.

"A handsome house, is it not?" cried Herr Ulrich, sitting down on a piece of rock looking exactly like a sofa; "I always thought the architecture far superior to any palace we have got in the Crimea, not excepting the vastly-admired pile which his highness Prince Woronzoff has raised up at Aloupka."

"You seem to know the interior of this cavern, which is magnificent, indeed," I observed, continuing to look round and round.

"Well, I ought to know it," replied our guide, "as I have visited it and the whole neighbourhood, known as the Tchatir Dag, or Tent Mountain, full hundreds of times, since I was a boy in leather breeches, and have spent many a day in exploring examinations."

The remark somewhat surprised me, as I had been all along under the impression, grounded upon many off-handed utterances, of Herr Ulrich being by birth a German, who had emigrated at an advanced period of his life to Russia. Feeling a deep interest in everything concerning our courageous friend and protector, I ventured to inquire at what age he had made the Crimea his home.

He gave a little laugh. "The precise moment I arrived in the Crimea," he replied, after a second's pause, having put down his lantern, and stretched out on the rock-sofa, "was the moment at which I was born. If you should be curious as to dates, I may tell you that my birthday falls upon this very day, the fourteenth of November, new style, and that it is exactly fifty-one years ago that I first saw the light of the world, welcoming it, I suppose, as human beings usually do, in tears."

I looked at Herr Ulrich as he uttered these words, and for the first time noticed, as he was lying before me on his stony couch, the athletic proportions of his figure, his massive head, sturdy limbs, and arms swelling with muscular power.

He had his eyes half shut, gazing upon the many-pillared vault, now gleaming mystic in the faint light, some parts streaked as before in the hue of rainbow colours and others wrapped in impenetrable darkness.

To break our friend's contemplative mood, against which he had just declaimed himself, I asked him how far it was from the cavern we were in to his home, and was informed in reply that it was not much more than two hours' walk. Though apparently inclined to silence, the mentioning of his home seemed to make Herr Ulrich a little more communicative, and he went on to tell me, remaining outstretched on the rock, with half-shut eyes, that Friedenthal, the village he inhabited, and his birthplace, was, together with two large neighbouring settlements, Neusatz and Rosenthal, and several minor hamlets, entirely inhabited by Germans, born and bred in the Crimea, but who not the less kept strictly to the language, manners, and customs of the country they had come from, holding no more than business intercourse with either Tartars or Russians, and regarding themselves still as children of "das schöne Vaterland."

"You enjoy, I suppose, some advantages over the old natives, which enable you to keep up your nationality and independence?" I remarked, our friend having made a short pause, and desiring much that he should go on with his account.

"So, so!" replied Herr Ulrich, "we possess various privileges, granted chiefly by the Empress Catherine II., such as exemption from service in the army, and a system of partly independent municipal government, but our chief advantages over both Russians and Tartars, I hold it, are education and industry. Every man, woman, and child in our settlements can at least read and write, if not possessing a higher education, and every man, woman, and child, if not disabled by illness or age, can and does work. We have no paupers, no prisons, and no hospitals, and almost the whole of our local expenditure is devoted to the support of public schools, open to the children of both rich and poor."

I could not suppress a smile at the glowing description of social happiness given by our friend, and remarked, "It seems you have brought the golden age back upon earth."

"If the golden age of man means chiefly full

lards," Herr Ulrich replied, with a touch of solemnity, "we possess some share of it, no doubt; but if it stands for complete human happiness, I am afraid we are almost as far from it as the armed crowds who are now hacking each other to pieces before Sebastopol, for less reasonable motives individually than tigers have in their fights."

The words were followed by a lengthened silence, which I felt no desire to interrupt, and then our friend continued, looking at me with a countenance full of profound sadness, "We have all our afflictions, but mine have been great, indeed. Ten years ago, I was the father of a family of six children—children as good, as loving, as noble-hearted as ever made the happiness of affectionate parents. All of them, save one, I lost in a single day, which made my hair grey, and bent my soul to the earth, in sorrow that will never end while I am breathing."

I fancied the eyes of the speaker were getting moist, and driven by inner impulse, I ran forward and seized both his hands. "Do not give way to grief," I cried, wishing to offer some sort of consolation, yet not knowing what to say.

"Thanks!" he murmured; "human sympathy is a precious balm, whenever true, and from you it seems to do me doubly good. There is something in your features that reminds me of the eldest of the three sons I lost."

"You have still a child left, I understand," I interrupted, desirous of changing the current of his mournful thoughts. "Is it a son?"

"No, a daughter," rejoined Herr Ulrich, "the youngest of the six children I once possessed. She, together with her mother, were saved from the pestilence which carried off the others by Dr. Schwartz, at the risk of his own life." "You see," he continued, after a little pause, "I am bound by strong ties to the doctor, and there is nothing in the world that I would not do at his command."

I was about to ask some questions regarding the gentleman to whom I owed my deliverance in the first instance, and who had taken such extraordinary interest in both my own and my cousin's fate, but at this moment Mike came up from behind. He seemed in a very excited state of mind, and coming close to me cried, "I say, how long are we going to stop in this nasty pit? I

don't like it at all, and would much rather be outside, hard as it blows."

"What does your friend say?" interrupted Herr Ulrich, evidently startled by the loud voice and rather violent gesticulations of my comrade.

On repeating to him Mike's question, his countenance, which had been relaxing into something like cheerfulness, again became very serious.

"I have been thinking on the subject ever since we came here, and, in fact, ever since I awoke this morning," he exclaimed, speaking very slowly. "I may tell you that I am bound to be home to-night, whatever may happen. My wife and daughter are expecting me, and they would be plunged in the greatest anxiety and misery if I should not make my appearance. What I am considering now is my duty towards you. I do not like to leave you here; but at the same time I do not see the possibility of carrying you away in safety."

"Is it the Cossacks you fear, or the storm?" I asked.

"Bah! the Cossacks," Herr Ulrich cried, with a gesture of contempt, "they would think no more of going near the Foul Kouba and up

the Tchatir Dagħ than of flying to the moon. No, what I am afraid of is the Wiuga. Be silent a moment, and you will hear the tumult of the hurricane even here in the bowels of the earth."

I listened attentively, and for the first time became aware of a strange far-off noise, sounding like the roar of distant cannon, intermingled at intervals with hideous screeches that made the blood run cold.

"The Wiuga has now spread his full wings," exclaimed our guide, "and for the next hour no mortal man can face the powers of the air."

"Then how will you get to your home?" I inquired.

"I must wait here at least an hour longer," replied Herr Ulrich; "but even after that time there will be great danger in moving about, and it is only because I know every step of the road I am taking, so as to be able almost to creep along it blindfolded, that I can hope to make my way safely over the hills. But as for you and your comrade, to leave the Cave would be running into open death, more certain than if you were marching upon a battery with all its cannon directed towards you."

"What do you propose under these circumstances?" said I.

"It seems to me," our guide answered, "that there is no other alternative but that you should take your quarters up here for the night, and till about noon to-morrow, when I shall be back, bringing assistance, if needed, to lead you to my house, or to some other place of safety."

I felt no objection whatever to the proposal, which appeared to me, indeed, the most natural to adopt. However, on communicating it to Mike, I was surprised to find him put in a staunch opposition. "I can't endure to be much longer in this nasty hole," he cried out; "it's worse than a dungeon, and I'd prefer a thousand times to stand the gale."

"But it is not a mere gale that is blowing now," I remonstrated; "do you remember how at the entrance to this cavern you were near being thrown off the cliffs by the force of the wind, which, as you may hear by the noise, has certainly increased since that time."

"Never mind," my comrade exclaimed, "I'd rather be in a ditch under a thunder-storm than stop here." "Besides," he added thoughtfully,

after a little pause, "you know, Alec, we have not got a morsel to eat, not to speak of drink."

It was an objection to prolonged stay in the Foul Kouba of which I had not been thinking, and though not feeling myself either hunger or thirst, I hastened to mention it to Herr Ulrich. He smiled, and raising himself on his seat and putting his hands into the pockets of his long caftan, withdrew therefrom successively a loaf of bread, a water melon, a couple of handfuls of dried figs, and a bottle of unusual size with a seal over the cork. While the process of bringing forth this collection of victuals was going on, I watched the countenance of Mike, and saw it gradually assume a brighter look. When the bottle at last had made its appearance, drawn from the deepest depths of the mysterious caftan, there was an entire change in his aspect.

"Well, Alec," he cried, rubbing his hands in a contented manner, "I see we shall not starve, after all, and I fancy we might go farther and fare worse. Now that I look around, the pit does not seem quite so dismal and nasty as it looked before. Suppose you ask our old man to be so kind as draw the cork?"

I made no reply to my impetuous comrade, getting a sign from Herr Ulrich to sit down at his side. Obeying the injunction, he asked whether I was really willing, together with my companion, to stay in the cavern till the following day, until his return, and on receiving a reply in the affirmative, he went on to give me instructions as to what to do in his absence. He advised that we should rest as much as possible, not on the damp ground, but on some rocky elevation, and that we should take our food in small quantities, husbanding it to the utmost extent. But, above all, he impressed upon me the necessity to keep the lantern carefully closed, so as not to have it extinguished by a sudden draught, and he left thereby in utter obscurity, adding that if this should happen by any accident, it would be a real misfortune.

On my promise to conform strictly to his orders, he went on, in a half bantering manner, "The chief reason why you must keep the lantern burning is that without the light you would not be able to move a step; but there is another in the fact that, by the universal testi-

mony of all who have spent a night here, the Foul Kouba is haunted. Do you believe in ghosts?"

My reply was a laugh, and on Mike asking what was the matter, I repeated Herr Ulrich's question to him.

"Tell our friend," my comrade cried, "that I will take care of all the ghosts we meet with in this or any other place, if he will only open his bottle. I am so thirsty as to be ready to do something desperate, even to drinking water, which, I believe, must be near, as I can hear it."

The last remark made me curious, and telling Herr Ulrich what my companion had said, I asked him whether there was any water within the cavern.

"Yes; your friend has a good ear, there is a small stream which has its source not far from us, and runs inward, it is believed, for many versts," was the reply.

"Then the cavern must be of immense extent," said I.

"So immense," replied Herr Ulrich, "that nobody has ever been able to ascertain its limits, although adventurous travellers, especially natives of your own country, have devoted a vast

amount of time to its exploration, and succeeded in penetrating to the extent of a day's journey into the interior."

"Did you ever spend a night here?" I asked.

"No, I did not," Herr Ulrich answered, "though I must say that it was not fear of the ghost which restrained me, but fear of rheumatism. Now, as to the ghost, the existence of which is averred by scores of persons who have been here, the story is as follows. Some seventy or eighty years ago, there lived in this neighbourhood a rich nobleman, a count, who had come from Moscow, where he had filled, it was said, a high position. He had a wife, but no family, and the wife had a companion in a young French lady of great beauty. To make a long tale short, the count liked the French lady better than his wife, and to get rid of the latter, enticed her into this cave and murdered her, giving out afterwards that she had destroyed herself. He being a person of great influence, no inquiry took place; but, singularly enough, twelve months after the foul deed had taken place, on the very anniversary of the day on which the unfortunate countess had left her

residence, never to return, the count and his beautiful Frenchwoman, who had gone out for a ride together, were thrown over a precipice not far from the entrance of the Foul Kouba, their horses having become frightened by a sudden apparition in the air.”]

“I suppose the apparition was declared to be the murdered countess, identical with the ghost in this cavern?” said I, scarce able to repress a smile.

“Just so!” our guide rejoined, very gravely; “the spectre, generally called the White Lady, seems, for some unknown reason, not to have been appeased by the punishment inflicted upon her husband and his guilty companion, and is said to continue to wander the earth.”

I felt a heavy hand on my shoulder. “For heaven’s sake, Alec,” cried my companion, “let’s have something to eat and drink, and don’t stand there prating.” And he made a step forward towards the tempting array of victuals, as if about to help himself.

Herr Ulrich, seeing the movement, at once arose, crying, “It is time that I should go, while you can do no better than sit down to a little meal, and look afterwards for a dry corner, and

stretch down." He grasped my hand and that of Mike, and giving us a hearty shake, exclaimed, "Auf Wiedersehen, till to-morrow!" After taking a few steps, he turned round his head once more, calling out, "Be careful with the lantern," and the next moment had vanished out of sight and hearing.

I felt a shade of melancholy creeping over me on seeing our guide and friend disappear in the darkness, but was roused from it in a moment by the merry gambols of Mike. He was in the highest spirits, throwing all sorts of capers while examining the state and amount of our provisions, and crying at intervals, "I think, my dear fellow, we may make ourselves comfortable!" adding, "I'm glad the gibberish has come to an end."

"You are wrong to say so, Mike," I remonstrated, "for what less would you have me do than talk with a man who has saved both our lives twice over?"

"No offence! no offence!" cried Mike, with a funny grimace, "I like the old man vastly, though he is a foreigner, and I only wish he'd left us his corkscrew behind. But never mind, we can manage." While saying this, my com-

rade drew forth a clasp knife, and with great dexterity pulled the cork from Herr Ulrich's large bottle. Then, with a "Here's your health, Alec! It's capital wine," he took a long draught.

Having carefully divided our provisions into two halves, Mike began to devour his share. I at once urged him very strongly to save a portion for the remaining number of hours that we would have to be alone, but all the eloquence I could muster was thrown away upon my comrade's good appetite.

"I tell you, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, cutting vigorously into the loaf before him, "there's truth in the proverb that a bird in hand is better than a dozen in the bush. Do you remember the splendid hind-quarter of a sheep we got the evening before the charge of Balaclava, and the roast mutton you were going to give us from it? There was nothing all the time the fight lasted of which I thought so much as the sheep's quarter that was hanging in our tent uneaten. When among the Russian guns, I came across a grey-coated scamp with a face exactly like that of the sheep which our trumpet-major

caught. He made a thrust at me; but, quicker than he, I stuck my lance into him, and I actually fancied for the moment to be getting a step nearer to the lost roast mutton."

It was no use telling my friend that the bird-in-hand maxim was not quite applicable to our present position. He insisted that it was, and, eating and drinking, told me so many comical stories that I finished laughing with him. I had never seen Mike so merry before; and even when our meal was over, and we had chosen ourselves a resting-place on a raised piece of rock, which seemed as if made for a couch, he went on telling tales and anecdotes, one more ludicrous than the other. Several hours went on in this way, till, having taken the last drop of what he considered his half share from Herr Ulrich's bottle, his eyes closed slowly, and his head fell back on the stone pillow. A minute or two after, various noises announced that my comrade had fallen into sound slumber.

I, too, felt very sleepy, but for a long time could not get the desired rest. The strange glitter of the pillared vault, and the fantastic shapes and colours of all the objects around, kept

working upon my imagination, so as almost to force me to keep my eyes open, till at last I bethought myself of placing our lantern in a dark corner, under a shelving piece of rock. Everything was now wrapt in semi-darkness, and not long after I fell fast asleep.

My slumbers had lasted a considerable time, when I was startled into consciousness by a cold shiver, which seemed to creep slowly from my feet to my head. Raising myself up and looking around I beheld a most strange vision.

Not more than a dozen feet from our couch there stood a lady, dressed in a long white robe, with a profusion of hair, of a colour like gold, falling over her shoulders, and her waist clasped by a circle of pearls and diamonds.

For several seconds I thought I was dreaming, but rubbing my eyes to discover whether I was fully awake, and then looking again, I distinctly beheld the lady moving forward, nearer to me, and lifting up her right arm. She appeared to be a woman of about twenty-five years of age, of strikingly handsome and regular features, but a face of deadly pallor, the intenseness of which was more strongly marked by a singular line of

scarlet that seemed to run round her neck. Having come to within a few paces of us, she fixed her eyes, first upon my comrade and next upon me, with a strange inquisitive glance, which gradually changed into a look of unspeakable sadness. I was trembling under the look, when she lifted up her right hand, beckoning me to follow her, at the same time gliding away towards a range of pillars on the left. For a moment I hesitated ; but, seeing the fair white hand beckon once more, I could retain myself no longer, and sprang from my resting-place.

As soon as my feet had touched the ground, and before I had made a step in advance, the white lady beckoned a third time, while opening her lips as if to speak. But at the same instant there came a terrible crash, and I saw the ledge of rock under which I had placed the lantern fall down and extinguish the light. All was wrapt now in utter darkness, and the next moment I heard a faint moan in the distance like the sobbing of a woman's voice.

CHAPTER XII.

"The time had come, or seem'd as if had come,
When Death no longer makes the grave his home ;
When wand'ring spirits leave their earthly rest
To mix for ever with the damn'd, or blest ;
When years, in drowsy numbers creeping by,
Are hung on minutes with their destiny."

JOHN CLARE, *The Dream*.

THE wail was still ringing in my ears, filling me with silent awe, when I felt myself grasped from behind by the nervous arms of my comrade. "What's the matter, Alec?" he cried; "what are you doing?"

"Did you see the White Lady?" I inquired, still almost breathless from excitement.

"White Lady!" retorted Mike. "You must be dreaming. All that I can see is that it is confoundedly dark. What has become of our lantern?"

"It was crushed under a falling piece of rock while the White Lady moved her arm," I replied, after a little hesitation.

"White Lady again!" ejaculated my comrade; "I wish you'd leave off your nonsense, my dear fellow. It's no time for fun, for, sure and faith, we are in a nice pickle to be without light in this nasty hole. What shall we do?"

I sat reflecting for a moment. My head was burning hot, and a cold perspiration came running down my back. Feeling as if stifled for want of air, I whispered, "Let us try and make our way to the opening of the cave as fast as possible."

"You are right, that's the best thing we can do," exclaimed Mike; and taking me by the hand he half guided half drew me along. We had not made many steps when one of my feet touched the bottle that had been left on the ground, and which, falling, broke into pieces.

"Good gracious!" shouted my comrade, "I have been groping for the bottle to take it with us, and now it's gone. It was nearly half full of wine, the best I ever tasted. By all that's——"

"Don't swear, Mike," I interrupted, "but let us get on as fast as possible. I feel very poorly."

The words, faintly uttered, instantly quieted my comrade; and, grasping my hand more firmly, he lead me forward in the most careful manner.

We walked a considerable distance, groping our way among columns and pieces of detached rock, and I was thinking that we ought to be near the entrance of the cavern, when all at once I felt my feet wet, and at the same time heard the sound of splashing waters.

"We are going in the wrong direction, Mike!" I cried, remembering on a sudden the remark of Herr Ulrich about the inward running stream.

"How do you know we are wrong?" asked my comrade. On my explaining all that I had learnt about the little river we had come to, its course and length, he clutched my arm with a movement of affright.

"We are done for, now," he faltered; "there's a chance of our being lost and starved to death in this infernal pit."

I doubted not that the casualty was but too possible, but said nothing, fearing to discourage my companion still more. After a minute's silence, feeling still very hot, I leant my face down to the stream in which we were standing to taste the water, and, somewhat to my surprise, found it beautifully pure and sweet, so that I took a long draught. It seemed to refresh and strengthen

me to an extraordinary degree, and, my previous faintness wearing off, I was enabled to reflect quietly upon our position.

All at once it struck me that the rivulet, which had been so comforting already, might be of still greater benefit in guiding us on our road, inasmuch as it was running, as I had been told, away from the entrance, so that if we could but keep in a direction opposite to its course we must get to the mouth of the cavern. Communicating my idea to Mike, he adopted it with a burst of delight, and we forthwith set upon the execution of the plan.

There was no difficulty in discovering the current of the stream, which was tolerably strong, and, having ascertained it beyond doubt, I gave my arm to Mike, and we both strode forward, taking care to turn our faces neither to right nor left. But before we had gone very far, we lost the stream from under our feet, and immediately after pushed against a large rock column, different in form from those we had previously encountered. Having groped round it, keeping our faces as exactly as we could manage in the old direction, we renewed our march, but came once more to a stand after the lapse of a few minutes.

The process of rounding a corner and keeping in a straight line had to be repeated here, and again and again at the end of every dozen yards, until I felt quite bewildered by the constant turnings and windings. Having spent, as far as I could judge, more than half an hour in these efforts, my hope began to fade that we should be able to find our way out of the cavern by the new system; however, I said nothing to Mike, who strode onward bravely, though rather faster than I liked.

I was beginning to get very exhausted, when all at once the noise of running waters fell again upon my ear, this time much louder than before. The dreadful thought that, instead of making towards the opening, we had got further into the interior of the cave quickly flashed upon my mind, and made me give an involuntary start.

"Are you tired?" cried Mike; but almost the instant the words had come from his lips, he, too, fell back a step, while uttering a cry of alarm.

"There's that accursed river again," he broke forth, after a moment's silence; "the game is all up, and we are as good as shot."

“Let us go a little further to examine,” I suggested; and drawing my comrade along, we both walked forward another fifty yards, till feeling once more the water cover our feet.

The first touch was sufficient to prove that the part of the river we had now come to was both deeper and more rapid than the point we had reached before, and that, therefore, we were further away from its source, as well as from the entrance of the cavern. Mike appeared to doubt it no more than I, and having put his hand into the stream, as if for closer investigation, he went back two steps, let go my arm, and threw himself on the ground.

“The best thing we can do is to lie down,” he cried out, in a dull tone of voice; “what happens, will happen, and we are no worse off here than anywhere else.”

I could not but think that my comrade was right, and sat quietly down at his side, to think over our situation. It was dismal enough; but when I came to ponder on all the circumstances, I began to think that it was not altogether hopeless. To be near a stream of excellent water was, I felt, a great comfort, as it would keep us, at any

rate, from dying the most horrible of all deaths, that from thirst, while, at the same time, the rapid current evidently helped to clear the air, making it much less stagnant and unpleasant than it was at the place where we had taken up our first quarters. Again, I thought that, in returning for us, and not finding us in the old place, Herr Ulrich would most likely search up the stream, and thus could not fail to discover us before long.

All these reflections put me in a more cheerful mood, which I sought to communicate to Mike by giving him the substance of my musings. But he seemed not at all inclined to take the same view of things as I, and to every hopeful argument I held forth opposed a couple of gloomy reasons, proving the contrary.

"You say the old man will search for us," he exclaimed, almost in wrath, when I had told him of this supposed probability; "but I tell you he will do no such thing. For what, indeed, should induce him to do it? On seeing his birds flown from the spot where he left them, with crumbs of bread strewn about, and, what's more still, that fine large bottle broken into shivers, what else can he think but that we have made

merry, and then taken ourselves off, out of this infernal pit, not fit for a dog to live in ? ”

There was some weight, I could not deny, in the dismal prophecy ; yet I made an attempt to parry it by suggesting that the very fact of the bottle being broken, would show that we had met with an accident.

But the insinuation only served to inflame the ire of my comrade. “ Likely, indeed ! ” he exclaimed, “ that men in their senses should leave such a treasure as that bottle in a place where it had a chance of being broken by accident. Oh, Alec, Alec, that was the worst thing you ever did, knocking over that bottle. If we only had it at this moment, things would not be half so bad as they are.”

“ Don’t be silly, Mike,” I cried, not able to refrain a laugh ; “ there is surely no want of drink near us, if we want any. Just taste that water, and see how delicious it is.”

The words, and my mirthfulness, had the unexpected effect of making my comrade more wrathful than ever. “ You needn’t insult me ; there’s no need for that ! ” he burst out, in great anger, moving at the same time a little distance

away, as if to indicate that he wished to hold no further converse.

I felt very sorry to have offended poor Mike at a moment when disagreement between us was most inopportune, and my first impulse was to grasp his hand, and restore his good humour by a few flattering words. However, just as I was going to do so, I was startled by a sight which left me speechless for surprise.

About a dozen yards in front of me, right above the stream, whose waters I could see now for the first time, there floated a luminous cloud, not larger in size than the crescent of the moon, but, as it seemed, gradually expanding. It rose and fell alternately, growing all the while, till, watching it with strained eyes, awestruck in mind, I saw it assuming the figure of the White Lady I had beheld the night before.

There could be no doubt that it was the identical apparition. The same, in minutest detail of form and dress, as I had seen her first, there stood the lady in her long snowy robe, the golden hair falling profusely over her shoulders, and the girdle around her narrow waist showing its glittering row of pearls and precious stones. The same,

too, as at the time just before she had disappeared, she held her right hand uplifted ; but the forefinger now seemed to point towards the singular scarlet line around her neck, which stood out in terrible contrast with the deadly pale face.

I gazed and gazed, with suspended breath, and seeing the lady twice move her hand, as if beckoning me to approach, I felt it impossible to rest any longer where I was, but turned round to get on my feet. In moving my arm it touched the shoulder of my comrade.

"Leave me alone," he cried at the instant, in a growling tone, "I am trying to go to sleep, and don't want to quarrel."

"But Mike, Mike!" I ejaculated, "just look at the White Lady!" Uttering these words, I sprang to my feet, and looked to the place where I had seen the apparition. It was gone. There was profound darkness in all directions; the white figure had disappeared, as well as the luminous cloud, and I could only hear, but behold not a glimmer of the current of water that was running in front of us.

"I am afraid you are ill, Alec ; your head can't be quite right," said my comrade, rising in his

turn, and laying his hand on my shoulder ; " what means all your talk about the White Lady ? "

I could not reply, overcome by a sudden attack of giddiness, which made me stagger towards the stream, where, kneeling down, I bathed my head in the cool water. Before I had finished, Mike was near me, groping his way, and then putting his arm round me, as if to prevent me from falling.

" Do come away," he cried, his voice assuming the old kindly tone ; " I am sure you are very ill ; but let me carry you, and we'll try once more to get out of this horrible place. It's like being buried alive to stay here."

The water had somewhat refreshed me, yet I felt still very faint, and could only get back with some effort to my old place. Thanking my comrade for his affectionate offer, I told him that his proposal appeared to me impossible of execution, but that if he would try to save himself, I should be content to be left alone. However, Mike would not hear of this, and after discussing the matter for a little while longer, I so weak as to be scarce able to speak, we both stretched out once more on the ground, near to each other, my comrade

depriving himself of his fur cap to make a comfortable pillow for me.

Everything now was hushed in silence, broken by no other sound than the trickling noise of the rivulet at our feet. My thoughts were getting gradually more and more confused, but the one idea remaining uppermost among them was that I was lying in a tomb. Mike's remark of being buried alive kept for some time echoing and re-echoing in my dulled brain, till at last consciousness ceased, and there was an end of thoughts and feelings, fears and hopes.

The heavy sleep, or trance, was not disturbed for a great length of time. At intervals, more or less distant, I felt as if half awake, and aware that a few drops of water were poured down my throat, and that they came from Mike's hollow hand. But beyond this I knew nothing. In the end, I became semi-conscious that I was perishing with thirst, and turned round to beg another handful of water from my comrade, yet could not bring him to hear me. The next moment I felt a sensation as if the ground was opening underneath me, and I was sinking down a boundless distance.

I kept on sinking and sinking, throwing in vain

my arms about to get rest somewhere, until I had reached the summit of a forest, the trees of which touched my face. Laying hold of one of the branches I tried to raise myself, at the same time opening my eyes and looking around.

It was broad daylight. The sun shone bright and warm, and birds were singing above me in the sky. Some half a dozen men whose faces I could not see were sitting near me on the grass, talking together. On my making a slight stir, one of them looked round, and I beheld the smiling countenance of Herr Ulrich.

CHAPTER XIII.

"'Tis in worldly accidents,
As in the world itself, where things most distant
Meet one another. Thus the East and West
Upon the globe a point in mathematics
Only divides. Thus happiness and misery,
And all extremes, are still contiguous."

SIR JOHN DENHAM, *Sophy*.

"GOTT sei gedankt!" exclaimed the wine-grower of Friedenthal, as soon as he had got sight of me, "you have come round at last. I was beginning to be dreadfully afraid about you."

Entirely unable to realise my position, I did not know what to say, and while trying to get my confused thoughts into some order, the other persons I had noticed crowded around me. They were all Germans, apparently, for they had no sooner come up when they broke forth into one sympathetic chorus, crying, "Ach, du mein Gott!" and "Du lieber Gott!"

The burst of lively astonishment having sub-

sided, one of the men, father of the group, to judge by his long white hair and general patriarchal aspect, addressed my old friend.

"I say, Meister Ulrich," he exclaimed, "the Markobrunner has done it: so give him another drop."

"Ganz gewiss, thou art right," was the immediate reply, which was no sooner uttered when I felt a large bottle stuck into my mouth, upside down. The movement was decidedly unceremonious, but as I could have no doubt of its being well meant, I accepted the proffered cordial, taking a sip from the bottle. It appeared to do me some good, and having sat quiet for another minute, the little crowd around me staring at me all the while as if I had been some curious animal, I found sufficient strength to speak.

"Where am I?" I asked, still very perplexed, and scarce able to find the German words I wanted; "and what has become of my comrade?"

"Stop, stop! not so fast!" Herr Ulrich rejoined quickly, signifying by a gesture that I should not speak; "you shall know everything in time, if you will only keep quiet." Then addressing two

of the younger men near, he called out, "you Ludwig, light a fire at once, and warm the broth which we have got, while you, Franz, run as quick as you can to Friedenthal and bring up the grey pony. Mind, you put on the best saddle, and tell my wife to get everything ready for our return."

"Ja, ja, Meister Ulrich," responded the individual spoken to, a tall flaxen-haired youth, with large blue eyes, and small drab moustachios. Not losing a moment in preparations, he seized a knotty stick, whistled to a shaggy brown dog, that was stretched out on the ground, and pushing off in long strides was out of sight in an instant.

"That dog deserves your gratitude, as he does mine," remarked Herr Ulrich, as soon as Franz and his four-footed companion had turned their back upon us.

"What do you mean?" I inquired.

"Wait a moment, and I will tell you," was the reply; and having given some instructions to the men who were still standing around, Herr Ulrich proceeded to squat down in the long grass near me, propping up at the same time my head with an armful of dry leaves.

Half sitting, half lying, in faint, dreamy mood,

I gazed into the bright flame that was rising up before me, fed by many hands, while Herr Ulrich told his tale. It sounded astounding to my ear. I learnt, and was seized by involuntary shudder at the information, that I had been four days and four nights within the cavern where we had taken refuge from the hurricane, and if it had not been for the sagacity of the dog whom the youth Franz had brought up at last, the dark recesses of the Foul Kouba would have become my grave.

The details of the story, related to me in a very circumstantial manner by Herr Ulrich, were that he had returned at the promised time to the place where he had left me and my comrade ; that finding us gone, he had made search in the adjacent passages for some hours, and in the end came to the conclusion that we must have found our way out of the cavern ; that he had next called in the aid of a number of his friends to beat the whole neighbourhood, which had proved to him, though only after the loss of twice twenty-four hours, that we could not have left ; that, next, with ever increasing alarm, he had entered the Foul Kouba once more, with all his companions acting as torch-bearers ; that for a whole day and a whole night they had

carried on their pursuit in vain, and that at length, when all hope to find us seemed lost, there appearing no end to the hideous subterranean mazes, and no mark to show whither the innumerable passages extending in all directions were leading, the dog had been brought into requisition, and having been led to the place which we had so imprudently quitted, had followed in our traces, and finally discovered us.

"But what has become of Mike, my comrade?" I exclaimed at last, not able to control my impatience any longer, when Herr Ulrich had come to the point of our discovery in his narrative.

"Your friend and comrade," replied the winegrower of Friedenthal, with the slightest perceptible smile on his countenance, "seems to be made of more elastic stuff than you. We found both of you apparently lifeless, he almost more inanimate than you, with nothing to show that he was not a dead man. But what was our astonishment when, having got into the open air, he at once sprang to his feet, gambolling about like a kitten. Very likely, while we were creeping through the narrow entrance of the Foul Kouba, he got a knock or two, which quickly restored animation.

However, you went through the same process with no advantage; and, indeed, I seriously trembled for an hour or two, after having tried all sorts of restoratives, that you were beyond the reach of human help."

"Then Mike is somewhere near, I suppose?" said I.

"Well, yes; not very far off," Herr Ulrich answered, another broader smile playing on his face. "To get strength, I gave to him, as I did to you, some of my best Markobrunner, and, the supply running short, your friend volunteered to go with one of my lads to Friedenthal and bring up a couple of bottles more. I let him go, thinking the little walk might do him good, but at the same time sent a message to my wife to give him a good dinner and keep him prisoner till our arrival."

The man addressed before as Ludwig, and who had acted as cook, came up at this moment, carrying a basin full of hot broth in his hand. "There, begin at once, now!" exclaimed Herr Ulrich; "my Markobrunner has done you good, I know, but this must finish to get you round again. It was rather thoughtful of my little

Mary at home to send her triumph of cookery to us on learning that we were searching after you in the cave, and might find you, if at all, exhausted for want of food."

"The broth is truly delicious," said I, having tasted a few spoonfuls; "is the lady to whom I am indebted for it your wife?"

"No, my little Mary is my little daughter, the darling of my heart!" Herr Ulrich cried quickly, his eyes opening up in a bright smile of intense happiness. "She is the dearest child that ever was," he added, after a moment's contemplative silence, "and expert in all manner of things; but her eminence as cook rests on the floating basis of broth—Fleischbrühe such as a king might deem a feast."

"Particularly if he is as hungry as I am at this moment," I rejoined, handing back the empty basin to my friend.

"I am sorry there is no more at hand," said he; "but we shall soon be home, and perhaps it will be best that, in the meanwhile, you should not take too much food, as it might hurt you after the long fasting. Come, try and walk a few steps, and you will have a fine prospect."

I had felt a wonderful accession of strength within the last few minutes, and rising from the ground I got on my feet, took the proffered arm of Herr Ulrich, and let myself be guided forth. We had been sitting on a grassy knoll, surrounded by trees and bushes which closed in the view on all sides; but a few paces brought us without, and then, in a manner as sudden as delightful, a most magnificent landscape unrolled before my eye. Outstretched right beneath us, absolutely like a picture, was a long valley intersected by hills and streams, and dotted over with towns and villages, hidden in the midst of orchards, gardens, and vineyards.

"There you see Simpheropol," Herr Ulrich cried, pointing a little to the left, towards a dense cluster of white houses, half-shrouded among trees, with a sparkling river running between. "From what Dr. Schwartz has told me," he continued, "I do not think you can have pleasant recollections of the capital of the Crimea; nor do I like it much, although its situation is very pretty."

"And what place is that, a little further off, to the right, on what seems to be a considerable river?" I asked.

“It is the town of Karassou Bazaar, nearly as populous as Simpheropol, and much more to my taste,” replied Herr Ulrich. “The chief dwellers at Simpheropol are brutish soldiers and corrupt Russian officials; while, on the other hand, Karassou Bazaar, which means the Market on the Blackwater River, has mainly industrious Tartars, Jews, and Armenians for its inhabitants—the latter as different from the former as good sheep-dogs are from prowling wolves. You will excuse me, I hope, if I express a dislike to soldiers, as a class?”

I could scarce help laughing on being reminded that I was still considered a British soldier, as I stood there in my Oriental costume, the long caftan flapping loosely about my limbs. My friend readily believed me when I told him that I did not feel in the least touched by his antipathy to the class he looked upon as wolves; and his face brightened visibly when I asked him another question regarding some groups of houses in the country before me. The villages, or small towns, to which I pointed, some three or four in number, were most charming to behold, embedded as they were in a luxurious abundance of flowers

and verdure, from above which were shining red roofs, with thin streams of blue smoke curling up into the sky.

"Oh, I am glad you like our German homesteads," Herr Ulrich cried, when I had told him how much I admired the flower-encircled dwellings; "the places you see there are our settlements of Neusatz, Friedenthal, and Rosenthal. Neusatz and Friedenthal lie close together, nearest to us, and a little further away, on the broad road connecting Simpheropol and Karassou Bazaar, is Rosenthal."

I remained gazing for a minute or two at the beautiful scene, the attractions of which seemed to increase the more I looked at them, when Herr Ulrich took me by the arm and drew me on again. Before we had taken a couple of hundred steps, crossing the brow of a little elevation that had been at our back, the scene changed as if by magic, and the green valley, towns, and villages disappearing, I beheld instead of them a mass of frowning cliffs, to the right of which, deep below at our feet, rolled the waves of the Black Sea.

The great heaving mass of waters seemed far

off and yet near ; and, as I looked upon it, every object standing out distinctly in the intense brightness of the air, under a flood of sunlight pouring from the western sky, I perceived in the distance two ships drifting slowly along, the first carrying at the masthead the Union Jack.

“See, there’s one of our men-of-war,” I cried, unable to withhold an exclamation of surprise.

“Yes, there is one of your great battle-ships,” quietly rejoined Herr Ulrich ; “and much good is it there.”

CHAPTER XIV.

"J'ai vu la Paix descendre sur la terre,
Semant de l'or, des fleurs et des épis.
L'air était calme, et du dieu de la guerre
Elle étouffait les foudres assoupis."

BÉRANGER, *Chansons*.

I did not at once understand the meaning of the words to which my friend had given vent, and with my eyes still riveted upon the British flag that was fluttering in the breeze, I asked him for an explanation. But he seemed rather unwilling to give it.

"There are subjects," he exclaimed, speaking very slowly, "upon which we two must, almost necessarily, disagree. I do not believe either in the justice or the necessity of this war; nor do I believe in the justice or the necessity of any wars, except those undertaken in defence of home and country. However, this is not the time nor place for arguments in the matter, and all I will say,

therefore, is that, as far as the big war-vessel yonder is concerned, it would be much better employed carrying provisions to your starving soldiers, and taking off the crowds of sick and wounded now perishing in your camp, than cruising about the coast here in proud uselessness."

I was painfully struck by the truth of the remarks, but feeling not at all desirous to enter into a discussion about the matter, I contented myself by asking Herr Ulrich whether the ships before us had been there during the hurricane.

"Oh, certainly not," was the quick reply; "if they had been there while the Wiuga was up, they would not be there now, but at the bottom of the sea. It is bad news to tell, but I may as well let you know at once that the report has arrived that the greater part of your fleet, not sheltered in harbour, was destroyed the day we entered the Foul Kouba."

"It cannot be true!" I exclaimed.

"I am afraid it is but too true," Herr Ulrich replied; "for the Wiuga that blew on that day was more terrible than ever remembered. Besides this, there is another proof that it occasioned the destruction reported in the fact that all

Cossacks have left these regions and gone south-westward in the direction of Cape Aitodor, where most of the wrecks are said to have taken place. You know, vultures will scent carrion from a distance."

"So we are free from our pursuers at last," I interrupted, not a little glad at the information.

"I do not think we shall meet any of the wolves again for some time; at least it is not at all likely," was the reply. "But I see Franz and the grey pony coming towards us," Herr Ulrich added, in the same breath; "let us be off as quick as possible, for the sun is sinking fast, and I should like to reach my home at Friedenthal before nightfall."

The word home, with the reference to Friedenthal, which looked, as indicated by the name, a true Valley of Peace, rang so pleasantly in my ear that I had no objection to make a speedy departure, although I would have liked to gaze for a little while longer upon the lake-like waters of the Black Sea, and the British flag floating on them. The next moment the grey pony, led by Franz, at whose heels walked the shaggy brown dog, were close to my side, and

having given a caress to my canine preserver, who accepted it very graciously, looking at me as if perfectly well aware of the relationship existing between us, I crept, with some assistance, into the saddle, and we set out on our road.

We had not gone far when the half a dozen Germans, whom I had seen before, but lost sight of during my short promenade with Herr Ulrich, came up again, closing in at the rear of us, so as to form a sort of procession. "They have paid another visit to the Foul Kouba," my friend remarked, glancing at our companions behind. "I can assure you," added he, "they are not a little proud of their achievement in exploring the haunted cavern, and rescuing you and your comrade, and it is to show their triumph that they are returning now with us to Friedenthal."

I felt much surprised to learn that the men near us had been visiting the horrible cavern, as I had been throughout under the impression that we were a long way from it. Expressing this to Herr Ulrich, he set me right at once.

"There is the entrance of Foul Kouba," he exclaimed, pointing to a black spot against the mountain side, a little above our heads, and not

more than a hundred yards from us. The thought that I had been four days in that living tomb, on the upper crust of which I was now, probably, riding, made me shudder once more, and, under the influence of the momentary excitement, I gave a touch to my grey pony, urging him into a trot.

"Glad to see you are making haste," cried Herr Ulrich, "and don't be afraid that we shall not keep up with you." Which saying, he marched on in faster strides, and the circle of our followers imitating his example, the procession went along at a rattling pace.

Our road for a little distance went sloping down gradually, over patches of grass and furze, till we came to a ledge of rock where it altered abruptly, becoming very steep and rugged. It was with the greatest difficulty I kept my pony from slipping over the loose pieces of rocks that were strewn plentifully over our pathway, and for a few minutes there seemed imminent danger that both he and I would slide to the bottom, amidst the mass of rolling stones that were constantly rushing downwards like avalanches.

However, the peril was averted by Herr Ulrich,

who, at the nick of time, seized the little horse, trembling all over with alarm, by the bridle, and thus guided, we safely got over the difficult passage to a more even road. Half an hour more brought us into some filbert woods, and issuing from them, it having become quite dark by this time, I could see the lights of a village in front.

"Here is Friedenthal," exclaimed my companion, looking up at me, his face overspread again with the bright and happy smile I had often before noticed. But the smile somehow made me feel sad. It was as if a sudden pang was shooting through my heart, which left me to feel bitterly the want of a home, while another rejoiced in the possession of it.

Our companions began singing before we entered the village, which, at our approach, appeared to stir all at once into life. There were greetings and hand-shakings at every door, and the joyous tumult went on increasing till we reached the dwelling of Herr Ulrich, a detached house, much larger than the others in the street we had passed, and overgrown on all sides with creeping plants and flowers. At the door stood a matron

lady, into whose charge I was given by Herr Ulrich, while he led the companions of our journey in a file to the garden behind, evidently bent upon giving them a treat.

"Be welcome, friend of my husband," the lady exclaimed, in so truly kind and affectionate a tone, that, when grasping her outstretched hand, I almost fancied to press that of a mother. Without further exchange of words, I was led into a most comfortably furnished apartment, with a large chimney at one end, containing a blazing pile of logs. Two persons were sitting in front of the fire, and getting near, I found, somewhat to my surprise, that one of them was my comrade Mike.

Turning round and beholding me, he quickly arose, but not to rush at me and shake me by the hand, but to introduce me to a fair young lady sitting at the other side of the chimney, telling me that I beheld in her "Miss Mary," the daughter of Herr Ulrich.

The introduction on the part of Mike, himself only the guest of a few hours, appeared to me so comical, that I could scarce refrain from laughing. However, seeing that the ceremony was acquiesced

in gracefully by both mother and daughter, I checked my rising mirth as best I could, and went to take my place in the family circle.

It became clear to me in a few minutes that Mike had made wonderful good use of the short time he had been under Herr Ulrich's roof to gain the affection of the inmates. Fair Mary, a sweet girl of seventeen or eighteen, fresh as a rosebud, and artless like a child, spoke English tolerably well, and evidently liked to speak it; and, taking hold of this advantage, my comrade, very gallantly as well as cleverly, had formed an acquaintanceship, which, to judge from the rapid way in which it had progressed already, promised soon to ripen into intimacy.

I had never before seen Mike with a book in his hand, but he now, to my great astonishment, took up a novel by Sir Walter Scott, which he appeared to have laid down when I entered, and read from it, handing it afterwards to Miss Mary to repeat the example.

To interrupt so charming a lesson would have been cruelty indeed; so I made haste to get into a good solid German conversation with our hostess, who seemed to wish for nothing better.

Before I had replied to one half the questions she asked about my recent adventures, Herr Ulrich entered, and joining in our talk, with many merry jests, and now and then a sly look at Mike and his daughter, an hour passed rapidly away.

Then supper came, and soon after I was led away by my kind host, who seemed over anxious that I should not undergo too much fatigue. With his arm linked in mine, preceded by a servant carrying a candle, and the affectionate Frau close behind, we went up a broad staircase, and from thence into an old-fashioned room, with pictures all around the walls, and a huge bedstead at one side.

"This is your room for the present," exclaimed Herr Ulrich, "and if you do not make yourself entirely at home in it, and in this house, we shall cease to be friends. Good night—Schlafen Sie wohl." And he shook me by the hand.

Frau Ulrich shook hands too, and having done so, gave me her blessing. "May God Almighty preserve and protect you, mein Sohn!"

I crept into bed, feeling as if a tear was stealing into my eye.

CHAPTER XV.

"Oh, my luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June :
Oh, my luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.
As fair thou art, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I :
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry."

BURNS, *Ballads*.

Nothing could exceed the deep, yet altogether unobtrusive, kindness which I received from Herr Ulrich and his wife during the whole time of my sojourn in their house. They treated me in every respect as if I had been their own son, entirely banishing cold formality and oppressive politeness from their intercourse, but showing their honest affection by a thousand little acts of parental tenderness, to the extent of almost forestalling the least of my wishes.

For more than a month, while I remained

under their roof, the days went flowing on quietly and uniformly, in delightful contrast with my previous storm-driven existence. At first, and until my wounds were healed and I had recovered my health, I remained entirely within doors, taking my meals at the family table, and employing the rest of the time in reading and writing, and in most agreeable evening chat with my kind and intelligent host, who gained my love the more I came to know of him. After a while, feeling strong enough, I took gradually extended walks through the neighbourhood, and got happier still in beholding the order and peace that was reigning everywhere and the singular contentment of the people. They tilled their vineyards, orchards, and gardens, stretched out charmingly on the slope of gentle hills, facing the south, as if the earth was an Eden, and suffering unknown in the world.

Sometimes, in the midst of my wanderings among the blissful indwellers of Friedenthal, I felt driven, as by secret impulse, to lay my ear on the ground, and try whether I could still hear the sounds of the mighty war raging within fifty miles to the west. The roar of the cannon of

Sebastopol was most distinct; yet, though listening to it again and again, I could never divest myself completely of the idea that the dull leaden sound, proclaiming hideous carnage and the death of thousands of human beings, must be a bad dream of my imagination. But very few of the honest, blue-eyed tillers of the soil, among whom I moved about, had ever seen the face of a soldier. They rose with the larks in the morning, and sang with the larks, and said their prayers to God, and worked hard, and slept soundly, and did not seem to know even that within little above a day's journey from them more than a hundred thousand men were engaged in the dread work of murder.

Quite contrary to my early expectations, I saw very little of Mike. He seemed to have become an altered being from the moment he set foot in the house of Herr Ulrich, losing all his former boisterousness of manner, rugged mode of speech, and tendency to occasional carousals, and turning instead a quiet, thoughtful man, almost too sober for his years.

It was plain from the beginning that he had been seized by a strong affection for the rosy

daughter of our host, and I set to watch the manifestations of it with as much curiosity as sympathy. At first, my former comrade shut himself up for the greater part of the day in the room assigned to him, and on questioning him whether he was ill, I could get no satisfactory answer, till at last I found out, quite accidentally, that he was studying German. This went on for about a fortnight, when one day, at the dinner-table, fair Mary let fall a sentence expressing her intention to assist a little in superintending the field work, as she had been too much indoors of late. The next morning, to my no slight surprise, I saw friend Mike strutting away, immediately after breakfast, with hoe and spade on his shoulder, accompanying the troop of labourers whom Herr Ulrich was daily leading into his grounds, as a wise and far-sighted commander-in-chief.

I took an opportunity, a few days after, when engaged in the late evening conversation, which had become an established feature in the routine of our existence, to ask our host whether my comrade did well in his amateur labours in the field. The reply, given with evident satisfaction, was

that he had shown himself skilful, as well as energetic, to an extraordinary degree, not in the least expected of him, and that, in fact, he did as much work as two or three ordinary journeymen.

It was clear from the remarks Herr Ulrich made, that Mike's newly developed talent was raising him very much higher in his estimation than he had stood before, and seeing this, I quietly tried to discover whether he was aware of the real cause which had brought my comrade to change his old soldier habits so far as to become, first, an industrious student, and then a more industrious farmer.

The replies I received to the few questions and hints I threw out, at once showed to me that our good host knew nothing whatever, nor even dreamt, of the passion his sweet little daughter had inspired in the heart of my old companion-in-arms. Upon the latter he seemed to look as a respectable, active lad, full of good nature and other admirable qualities, but somewhat devoid of imagination; while, on the other hand, he spoke of his daughter as the merest child, with whom nobody could think of falling in love, least of all such an unsentimental young man as he believed

Mike to be. That he liked him, I could see ; but it seemed doubtful, nevertheless, whether he would like him as his son-in-law.

The state of affairs appeared to me sufficiently serious to speak to Mike about it, which I did one evening, about a week after he had taken to his field labours. Meeting him alone in the garden, I told him frankly that I thought a great change had taken place in his character, as he had ceased to treat me with the old, unrestrained behaviour of a friend and comrade. The words I uttered evidently displeased him, for he silently strode on a few steps, as if going to leave me without so much as a remark. However, all at once he turned back again, and, grasping my hand, shook it warmly.

"Pardon me, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I scarce know what I am doing. There are moments, and this is one, when I feel almost distracted."

"You have fallen in love, Mike," said I, smiling.

"Yes, I will not deny it," he rejoined, hanging his head ; "I became attached to Mary the first hour I arrived here, and have got more and more

fond of her since, so much so that now I would rather die than leave her."

"Is she fond of you, too?" I inquired, keeping my eyes fixed upon my comrade.

"There you ask me a question which I am not able to answer to myself," he replied, giving me a mournful look; "I was vain enough the first few days to believe she liked me, but it has struck me since that she treats everybody else the same as me, which makes me think that, after all, she cares no more for me than for you or any other acquaintance."

"Then I had better fall in love with her, too," I cried, "since my chance is as good as yours, and she is, I must confess, a prize worth winning."

"You wouldn't do such a mean thing, Alec: I am sure you wouldn't!" Mike exclaimed, in a tone half imploring, half angry.

It was evident that my poor comrade was in too high a state of excitement to bear being teased; so I soothed him at once by the assurance that I had only spoken in jest, and that I had not the least intention to compete with him in his field of love. But, getting into the serious mood, I could not help telling him at the same

time that, before letting his affections carry him any further, he ought to consider gravely the ultimate result, not forgetting, in the first instance, his tie as a soldier.

"I have thought of all," he rejoined, brightening up a little while I was speaking to him. "As to my being a soldier, that is the least thing which troubles me. My friends at home are pretty well off, and can buy my discharge at any time, when it comes to that. I enlisted in a freak, like many of our fellows, and have long been sick of the business."

"But I doubt whether they can buy your discharge while the war continues," I interrupted.

"While the fighting goes on, I am a Russian prisoner," Mike replied, with imperturbable logic; "and I have been told by my grandfather, who was a soldier too, that when a war has come to an end, our masters are always glad to sweep off the old hands, and particularly men wounded, and get fresh food for cannon. It saves pensions, you know: the precious shilling a-day."

"May be you are right, Mike," said I, dreamily.

"No, no! It's not that which troubles me," my comrade continued; "but the uncertainty whether she cares for me or not. As to her father, I believe he is well inclined towards me; and as for her mother, I know she is."

"Then why don't you put the question to her point blank?" I interposed.

"Oh, I couldn't, Alec! I couldn't for the world!" Mike broke out, staring at me as if I had suggested something altogether preternatural. Then, reflecting for a moment, and coming close to me, and laying his hand in mine, he exclaimed, timidly, "I wish you would speak for me."

I could scarce keep from bursting out in a fit of laughter. However, I checked it, asking, "But why cannot you speak yourself?"

"Ah, you know, Alec, I do not understand the art of talking," my comrade cried, with some impatience; "and, besides, I do not know her own language as you do. She understands English well enough, it's true; but I am sure she would like better being spoken to in German."

"Then why don't you learn German, Mike?" I went on, still in a bantering mood.

"Haven't I tried hard already?" retorted my comrade, earnestly. "You don't know how many nights I have sat up for the purpose. But I can't get on, somehow. It won't stick to me."

"Try again, Mike," I exclaimed, more and more touched by the evidently profound devotion of my unfortunate friend. "Try again, and accept me as your teacher. I will promise this much to you, that if you keep to your work, not many weeks shall pass over before you are able to make love to your Mary in her native language. Then, even if she should say Nein in the end, it will not sound to you as harsh as the shorter English No."

Mike smiled faintly, like one deeming it to be polite to do so, but scarcely appreciating the fun in the matter. At the same time, he gratefully accepted my offer to give him lessons in German, showing himself so anxious to profit by them as to insist to begin the same evening.

The linguistic studies of my comrade gave me rather more trouble than I expected, as he decided, very wisely, not to neglect over them his field labours, which were gaining for him the golden opinions of Herr Ulrich. The dark hours,

therefore, had to be devoted to grammar and reading, and many a night my sleep was abridged by one-half through the fierce desire of Mike to get on with his lessons. He progressed wonderfully, indeed, and before he had been much more than a month at Friedenthal, he was able to read German with some fluency, and to take part in an ordinary conversation.

Christmas was approaching now, and the preparations made in the house of Herr Ulrich to celebrate it were on a large scale. The passages and staircases were hung with evergreens; garlands of laurel and mistletoe came to cover walls and ceiling of the great sitting-room, the midst of which was filled by a large fir-tree; and the tumult taking place in the kitchen made it appear as if our host intended to have all the village for his guests on the Weihnacht, the Sacred Night. We were told that there would be singing and recitation after the Christmas-tree had been lighted, and, in order to offer our slight contribution to the general festivity, I composed for myself a little address in rhyme, and induced Mike to learn by heart a German translation of one of Burns' ballads, of which Mary had once

expressed admiration, the little ballad, "Oh, my love's like a red, red rose."

Mike set to his task with immense zeal; but when he had mastered his piece of declamation, in a very satisfactory manner, he got melancholy all on a sudden. On asking the cause of his sadness, the day before Christmas-eve, he confided to me that he felt sure that Mary was getting more and more indifferent towards him, having shunned his company of late, and once or twice quitted the room when there was a chance of their being alone. I attempted to console my poor comrade, but he only shook his head, and in the end told me, in profound dejection, that he should be glad to have an opportunity to quit the house altogether, even if it should be as a Russian prisoner of war.

The next morning, while we were sitting at breakfast, and all was bustle in Herr Ulrich's house to give the finishing stroke to the preparations for the celebration of Christmas-eve, the agitation was increased by the arrival of a mounted messenger with letters for our host. He had no sooner glanced at them, when he threw a little note across the table to me, ex-

claiming, "That may solve some of the questions you have been asking."

I saw at once, by the handwriting, that it was a letter from Donald, about whom I had been making constant inquiries, with no other result than that of learning that he was staying with Dr. Schwartz, and taken good care of. My cousin now told me himself that he had been for more than a month the guest of Dr. Schwartz, or rather of his patron, Prince Labanoff, at the mansion of the latter at Baktchi-Serai, to which he had been taken, in preference to Friedenthal, with the view of enjoying the best protection, as well as the best medical care. It was the doctor's wish now, I was informed, and also that of the youngest son of Prince Labanoff, that I should join them for a few weeks; and they would be pleased, Donald added, if my comrade Mike were to come with me.

Communicating the contents of the note I had received to my friends at the table, I asked Mike whether he felt inclined to accept the invitation we had received.

"Yes, I should like to go," he replied quickly, "and can start at once, if you are ready."

Herr Ulrich looked at his wife, and she at him, and I could not but notice that they exchanged a significant glance.

"But I really cannot consent to your leaving at once," our host began, after a moment's pause, addressing me. "It is well enough you should visit your relative, and the friends you have known longer than me; but you must spend at least the Christmas-eve with us."

To refuse so kind a demand was quite impossible, and, anxious though I was to see Donald again, I readily consented to postpone my journey for twenty-four hours. Mike nodded his assent to the arrangement, looking more melancholy than ever, and as if lost in the depth of bitter reflections.

We spent the day in taking a long walk over the hills to the south, so charming in the bright sunshine, and fresh air blowing into our faces, that even poor Mike was visibly cheered. He had at starting expressed a strong disinclination to recite in the evening the poem he had taken so much trouble to learn, but, on being remonstrated with, he again consented to it, promising, at the same time, to do all he could to throw off his

gloom, and so contribute to the happiness of the good friends who had absolutely lavished their kindness upon us.

It was night when we returned to our home, where everything was in a high state of joyous excitement. The Christmas-tree was full ablaze already, and a crowd of happy people, male and female, most of them well-known faces, were sitting around a couple of long tables, eating and drinking, while between them, up and down, passed Herr and Frau Ulrich, asking questions and giving answers, with a kind word and a cheery smile for each. Full justice having been done to the good things on the tables, the guests in the room went to sing two songs in chorus, after which our host passed round once more among them to give to each a little present. The donations were mere trifles; but they were received, nevertheless, with great thankfulness, and, with the expression of it on their lips, the visitors filed out of the room, one after the other, having previously shaken hands warmly with Herr Ulrich and his wife.

The host and hostess, their daughter, Mike, and I, now retired to a smaller apartment, where our

supper was laid out. We had not been at table long, when a whispering as of many voices was heard outside the window, and the next minute there burst forth the full strains of a band. The musicians, playing to perfection, struck up first a lively tune, and next gave the melody of an ancient Christmas song, joined in by a number of children's voices. It sounded exceedingly sweet in the stillness of the night, and we all sat looking at each other, while I saw a tear stealing down the face of Frau Ulrich. I fancied she was thinking of those children of her own, who had once sang sweet Christmas songs to her, and were now sleeping their long, last sleep under the green turf of the God's Acre of Friedenthal.

When the music, intended as a serenade to our host and hostess, was over, we fell into conversation, first serious, but gradually more lively, Herr Ulrich making evident efforts to drive the tears from his wife's eyes. To do so he sang, in a fine bass, an old German ballad, which was followed by another by his daughter, who gave hers in a tenderly beautiful voice, to the accompaniment of a harp. My poor comrade was hanging his head on his breast while the sounds

came warbling from her lips, and I could read in his face the despair he felt on leaving, before the end of another day, the fair singer.

But suddenly the voice of Herr Ulrich broke in, addressing us. "Now it is your turn!" he cried, looking first at me and then at Mike. "I have reserved the best bottle of wine, my Falernian, as I call it, in the cellar, to inspire you," he added, "and you may give us what you like: only give it vom Herzen."

Our host filled the glasses, and then I began my little Christmas address in rhyme, which was listened to with the deepest attention, and when finished brought me so much praise, both from my elderly friends and their beautiful daughter, that I felt half ashamed of all the compliments.

Herr Ulrich, in a state of high glee, emptied two glasses of his Falernian, drinking my health and that of my comrade, and then asked Mike to pay his tribute. I was prepared to see him exhibit some reluctance; but, quite unexpectedly, he rose as soon as called upon, and commenced his recitative. His voice was slightly trembling when declaiming the first verse of Burns' ballad.

"Mein Lieb ist eine rothe Ros',
 Im holden Mai erblüht;
 Zu hören ihr süß Stimmchen bloß
 Ist mir das liebste Lied.
 Und wie Du hold bist, theures Herz,
 So lieb ich Dich, so sehr:
 Und lieben werd ich Dich, mein Herz,
 Bis trocken wird das Meer."

"Oh, how charming!" cried our hostess,
 addressing her daughter. Mary said nothing,
 but stood motionless, in dreamy mood, leaning her
 arm on that of her mother. After a second, my
 comrade went on, with raised voice:

"Bis alle Meere trocken sind
 Die Sonne schmilzt den Stein
 Will ich Dich lieben, süßes Kind,
 Im tiefsten Herzen mein.
 Leb' wohl, leb' wohl, mein einzig Lieb,
 Leb' wohl auf kurze Zeit:
 Ich komme, komme bald, mein Lieb,
 Wär's tausend Meilen weit."

There was a moment's deep silence. Then
 Mary went forward timidly a step, and looking up
 at Mike, said, in half whisper, "Do not leave
 us!"

My comrade made a movement as if to speak,
 but not a word came over his lips, till Herr Ulrich
 approached him.

"My wife told me last night that she has reason to think you are fond of our daughter," exclaimed our host in quiet solemnity, but with a slight tremor in his voice; "is it so, and do you truly love our Mary?"

"I love her truly and with all my heart!" Mike burst out.

"And do you, Mary, love him in return?" cried our host, keeping his eyes fixed upon his daughter. She blushed purple red, and threw herself into his arms.

Herr Ulrich gently took his daughter's hand, and placed it in that of my comrade.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Whilst timorous knowledge stands considering,
Audacious ignorance hath done the deed;
For who knows most, the most he knows to doubt;
The least discourse is commonly most stout."

DANIEL, *Philotas : a Tragedy*.

I HAD to dispense with the company of Mike in the visit to my cousin and Dr. Schwartz. Having risen some hours before daybreak, on the morning of Christmas-day, to set out on the intended journey, my comrade came into my room, and made a lame attempt to persuade me that he was willing to start, if I wished him to keep to his promise. But the look of his face while he was speaking was enough to proclaim the hypocrite, so that I took the liberty of telling him straightforward that the best thing he could do would be to bid me good-bye quickly, and attend upon his Mary.

We were still conversing together when Herr

Ulrich made his appearance, candle in hand, telling me that the conveyance that was to take me to Baktchi-Serai was waiting at the door, but that I would do well to have a little breakfast before leaving. I did as desired, and having taken a cup of coffee in company with my host, but without seeing either his wife, or his daughter, I went to the door.

Stepping over the threshold, my vanity received a slight shock on beholding, by the light of a lantern, the kind of conveyance destined for me. It was a rude one-horse cart, loaded to the top with potatoes, two enormous pumpkins dangling in the rear, while an old plank was fastened with ropes in front to serve as a seat for the driver and me. The idea of going to the mansion of a prince in a potato cart struck me as so novel that I could not help staring a little, which was not unobserved by Herr Ulrich. Drawn aside by him, I was enlightened in a moment as to the use and value of the load of potatoes.

"I should have told you before," he exclaimed, half smiling, and speaking in a whisper, "that it is by the suggestion of my friend, Dr. Schwartz, in which I fully concur, that you are going to

travel in the cart you see here. Although you are no more pursued by Cossacks, as far as I am aware, the journey to Baktchi-Serai is yet not without its dangers, and the safest way of escaping them will be for you to impersonate one of our Bauern. The lad who is driving you is one of my servants, speaking nothing but German, and under the impression that you are a relative of mine, on a temporary visit to my house. This character you must keep up carefully, and there will be no difficulty in the matter, as you are dressed the same as all of us, and know our language. Under the arrangement I have made, you need no passport, nor paper of any kind, for if you should be stopped, all that is necessary is that you should say, shouting German as loud as you can, that you take Kartoffeln to the house of Prince Labanoff. Good-bye, then ; and come back as soon as possible. May God protect you !”

Herr Ulrich, with this final exclamation, shook me by the hand ; and having responded to his hearty farewell, I clambered up the cart, and took my place at the side of the driver, a tall, stout, raw-boned youth of eighteen, or nineteen. He cracked his whip, and the next moment we went

lumbering along the high street of Friedenthal, known to me as the Simpheropol Strasse.

More than an hour elapsed before daybreak, and not knowing what better to do in the darkness, I tried to open conversation with my neighbour. But I found him to be a remarkably unintelligent specimen of a lad, much more so than I should have believed it possible to exist in the pleasant colony I was turning my back upon, and having vainly questioned him as to his occupations, learning little else but that the name he went by was Johann, and that he had been planting cabbages the week before, I gave him up in despair. Johann seemed quite content to be left alone, his whole attention being concentrated on keeping in his mouth a tobacco pipe of vast dimensions, the bowl of which hung over the front of the cart, close to the tail of our horse.

I was glad when at last the sun arose in our rear, softening the keen wintry air, and dispersing the waves of grey fog that were rolling down from the hills. Being able to look around, I perceived that we had left the high road to Simpheropol on which we had started, and were proceeding up-hill, along a small lane full of ruts, and

with an abundance of stones, which sent our cart in continual bumps from one side to the other. There was very little information as to the direction in which we were going to be obtained from Johann, who had greater difficulties than ever with his pipe, the latter getting into contact, now with the wheels, and the next moment with the tail of the horse, smoke and fire whirling about meanwhile in all directions. Our horse seemed to be altogether opposed to his master's indulgence in tobacco, and kept whipping the bowl about, going so far as to direct against it on a favourable occasion a tremendous kick with the hoof. The knock would have sent it into splinters had I not stretched forth my hand at the right moment and rescued it from destruction.

Johann seemed as much touched as the nature of his feelings allowed when perceiving the service I had done him. For the first time since we had been neighbours on the rope-bound board fronting the potatoes, he opened his lips to me, and, holding his pipe firm in one hand, volunteered a speech. It was to inform me that in about another hour we should get to a Dorf, called Sultan; that in this place there was dwelling a German,

a friend of Herr Ulrich; and that this person would give us "etwas zu essen," that is, something to eat. Having told me this, Johann's face brightened up visibly; he refixed his pipe in his mouth, and flourished his whip, and we went flying along amidst clouds of dust and tobacco smoke.

We reached the village announced to me within the hour, stopping at the door of the hospitable German. He was away from home; but his wife, a buxom lady of middle age, received us with all honours, her eye brightening when told by Johann that I was a relative of his master. Emptying out the contents of her larder, in mixed profusion, I had bread and milk, honey and wine, cheese and grapes, pears and pickled cabbage, offered to me in succession, and while Johann was helping himself freely to all, eating as if he had fasted for a whole month, our fair entertainer opened upon me a cross fire of questions, asking my age, where I was born, what business I had been brought up to, and lastly, whether I was married or single.

Having answered satisfactorily all the queries put to me, I tried in turn to learn something

regarding the state of the road to Baktchi-Serai, and whether it was occupied by troops. But to my great surprise, the loquacious lady could give no answer to any of my questions. She told me that she had never been to "Bakschi" in her life, and, therefore, did not know what kind of road led to it; and as for soldiers, she had heard that they were near somewhere, but had never seen any of them, as her Dorf was lying a distance from the high road, and had little communication with any other place. Even about the war, and the siege of Sebastopol, she knew nothing. She often heard at night, she informed me, the dull roar of the cannon reverberating in the ground; but that did not trouble her much, since her husband had told her that, try as they might, the fighting people could never shoot as far as their Dorf.

I envied the good woman her comfortable philosophy and blessed ignorance, and having regaled myself with a modest quantity of bread and grapes, and stirred up Johann, who seemed scarce able to move, after his abundant repast, I shook hands with her, and we rumbled off again. The uneven track over which our cart was moving got so much worse shortly after we had left the village, that I began

to think it could not possibly be the road to a considerable town, which drove me into another desperate attempt to question Johann. His pipe appeared to be burning low, and I was full of hope that should the store of tobacco in the gigantic bowl come to an end, he would indulge in a short pause from smoking.

"Are you sure we have not lost our way?" I inquired of my neighbour, seizing a moment when he had puffed forth a dense cloud of smoke, and seemed to draw breath for further labours.

"Ja, ja! mein Herr, ganz recht!" he gasped forth; "we are exactly on the right road, which will take us to Bakschi; but all the way we shall get nothing to eat." And Johann clung to his pipe again, in a stern mood, repeating, between his teeth, "Nichts zu essen!"

I felt sorry in my heart not to have a loaf of bread in my possession, to try the wonderful experiment as to whether the stout youth at my side could eat anything more. In return to my direct question whether he felt hungry, I got a nod of the head, and he seemed on the point even of saying something, but at that moment the restless horse-tail once more got into contact with the bowl of

the pipe, and his whole attention had to be directed to keep it from harm.

Becoming impressed with the feeling that it would be best to leave Johann alone, and to disturb the current of his healthy ideas as little as possible, I threw myself back on the seat, leaning against a sack of potatoes planted up in my rear. In the new position I was less enveloped in tobacco smoke than I had been before, and able to survey the country through which we were passing. It was rather pretty, though not very varied, the hills which had bounded the early part of our road having retreated gradually to a further and further distance, scarce visible at last amidst the masses of grey clouds that were hanging loweringly on the eastern horizon. The clouds coming nearer to us, finally dissolved into drizzling rain, which made me draw my mantle, a most solid garment with immense cape and hood, the gift of Herr Ulrich, close over my head, after which, impervious to the wet, I awaited the end of the journey in resignation.

The drizzle in the course of an hour, while the shades of evening were falling, turned to a regular downpour of rain; but this did not induce Johann

to drive the least bit faster. It only appeared to have the effect of interrupting the equanimity of his smoking, disturbed by the rain getting into the pipe, through the bowl. The vexation this seemed to cause to my neighbour, first slight, increased as we went on, till at last it was evidently on the point of being vented in some little act of impatience, when all at once our horse stumbled. It got quickly again on its feet, and then I perceived for the first time that we had come on a paved road and were going down a steep hill.

"There is Bakschi," exclaimed Johann, withdrawing his pipe for a second from his mouth, and visibly delighted to have reached once more human dwellings, where he could get something to eat.

I could see through the pouring rain and the growing darkness that we were within a couple of hundred yards of a large building, which appeared to block up the road, and which I fancied having seen before. A minute after we had reached it, and Johann pulling up his horse, I found that we were under a dilapidated archway, with a small gate to our right, leading into a house. Out of it,

almost before our cart had come to a standstill, rushed a couple of soldiers, who began speaking to us in Russian, unmistakably asking for our passport. In the most phlegmatic manner, Johann pointed over his shoulder to the load of potatoes behind, while I, to give due emphasis to his gesture, cried out "Kartoffeln für Prince Labanoff."

Whether it was the sound of my words, when I should have kept quiet, or my pronunciation, but instead of letting us go on, as I expected, the soldiers whispered to each other for a moment, and then one of them went back into the house from whence he had come, and brought out two more men and an officer. The latter at once addressed me in broken German, while one of the soldiers at his side held up a lantern, so as to show my features.

"Woher kommen sie?" he asked.

"Friedenthal!" I replied, determined to be as laconic as possible.

"Wohin gehen sie?" he went on.

"Prince Labanoff!" shouted I.

"Was bringen sie?" he continued his questions.

"Kartoffeln!" I cried, hallooing still louder.

My responses, and the steadfast smoking of Johann, who kept puffing away with fierce energy, as if to take the utmost advantage of the fact of he and his big pipe being under shelter, had the evident effect of chasing from the mind of the officer all doubt of our not being what we represented ourselves; and throwing one more look, first at my neighbour and then at me, he made a sign to the soldiers in front to let us pass on.

The light of the lantern had scarce been withdrawn from my face when I noticed a man, in civil garb, a little distance behind the soldiers, looking very fixedly at me. He was leaning against the wall, in the shadow of the archway; but on the officer re-entering the house, he came forward a little, and I recognised at the instant a set of features engraven on my memory. It was the self-styled Dr. Young, otherwise Charles Collier.

He seemed to remember me, in a doubtful sort of way, as if not quite sure whether he could trust his memory. I fancied he was wavering for a moment between calling back the officer and following us; but on Johann giving the

whip to the horse, he quickly decided upon the latter course, striding after us in long steps. We went cantering down-hill at a rapid pace, and looking back cautiously, not without inward trepidation, I perceived that he had hung himself to the cart, evidently unable to keep pace with it otherwise.

"There is a fellow clambering up behind," I whispered to Johann.

"Was der Teufel!" he rejoined, taking the pipe from his mouth; "he will steal our potatoes." And, lifting up his whip, he lashed out a tremendous stroke, instantly followed by a piercing shriek of pain.

"Drive on, Johann! drive on!" I exclaimed; but before the words were well over my lips, I saw the man Collier rush in front of our horse, and seize the reins. He seemed foaming with rage, and there was a red line of blood, mark of the whip, across his face.

"Get away there, you thief!" shouted my neighbour, fast losing his equable temper, and still under the impression that he had an affair with a robber.

For all reply, our antagonist drew a glittering

dagger from his pocket, and held it up in the air, as if to show the power he was possessed of, and which he might exercise, if needed. The action, however, was entirely misunderstood by Johann.

"The rogue is going to kill my horse!" he cried, affright on his countenance; and with an alertness I would not have given him credit for, he jumped from the cart, and closed in with our foe.

For a minute or two I was scarcely able to see what was taking place. The rain was rattling down upon the deserted pavement, and there was but a faint streak of light from a distant lamp, fastened to a dead wall, to show the struggle. However, I could see enough to be aware that it was fierce on both sides. There was great agility on the part of the stranger, but far superior physical power on that of Johann; and before the lapse of three or four minutes it became apparent that the latter was getting the upper hand.

All at once, while I was yet straining my eyes to watch the progress of the contest, I was amazed to see the persecutor of my cousin lifted

up in the muscular arms of Johann, held for a second in the air, and then dashed to the ground. He fell with a heavy thud, close to the wheels of our cart, and, looking down, I saw a stream of blood gush from his body. The dagger he had brandished, in the fall had stuck into his breast.

Johann, for a moment, looked on in dumb astonishment; and next made a movement as if to raise the blood-covered body from the ground. But the same instant the steady tramp of a body of soldiers on march resounded behind us, in the direction from which we had come. I sprang from the cart, and grasping my companion by the arm, pushed him up to his seat. Then, taking my place again at his side, I told him, in authoritative tone, to drive with all possible speed to the mansion of Prince Labanoff. He seized the reins, obedient like a child, and, putting the horse into a gallop, we dashed along the silent streets.

In spite of his apparent agitation, Johann did not lose his way in the maze of streets of the old Tartar town, but after endless turnings and windings, in the course of a quarter of an hour,

drew up at the gate of the dwelling I felt eager to reach. I recognised the house at once, and running up the steps that led to the front entrance, was about to knock at the door, when it opened by itself, and Dr. Schwartz appeared on the threshold, with my cousin close behind, the latter so disguised in appearance and dress that I barely knew him again.

The doctor stared on beholding me; but I merely bowed to him, and rushing up to Donald, told him in a whisper what had happened.

"We must not wait a second," he cried, "or it will be all over with us!" Drawing me with him, he ran down the steps, took hold of Johann as if he had been a bundle of clothes, set him on the ground, and then led the horse and cart away, leaving me to take care of the driver.

I waited a minute, and seeing my cousin disappear in the darkness at the back of the mansion, I again ran up the steps, motioning Johann to follow me. Before he had got to the top, I had rejoined Dr. Schwartz, and made him acquainted, in a few words, with the events of the last half hour. His countenance got overspread with a look of consternation on listening

to me ; and almost before I had finished, he took my companion by one arm, and me by the other, and pushed us before him. Crossing several rooms and passages, feebly lighted, and with not a soul in them, I found myself the next moment in the doctor's study, vividly remembered by me as containing the skeleton in the glass case.

"This must be your and your companion's prison for a couple of hours," he exclaimed, opening his lips for the first time. I bent my head in silent acquiescence to the order, while at the same moment there came from the outside the prolonged sound of a heavy roll of drums.

CHAPTER XVII.

"When the sun sets, shadows that show'd at noon
But small, appear most long and terrible :
So when we think fate hovers over our heads,
Our apprehensions shoot beyond all bounds."

LEE, *Edipus*.

THE roll of drums lasted for several minutes, intermingled, now and then, with the quavering of trumpets. While it continued, Dr. Schwartz stood quietly listening, till, in the end, the sounds getting fainter and fainter, his face brightened up a little.

"It is nothing but the noise of troops marching past, and halting for the moment before our house," he exclaimed. "You must know," he added, after a short pause, "that the dwelling in which we are has among its inmates a high commanding officer, General Galitzin, brother-in-law of Prince Labanoff, and it is no doubt on his account that we have been alarmed by the

military music. But I must leave you now for half an hour, as I have urgent business on hand. Please make yourself comfortable, for you are perfectly safe here." And with a smile and a bow the doctor left the room, while a faint click the next instant proclaimed that he was locking the door from the outside.

Dr. Schwartz having turned his back, I looked about to see what had become of Johann. The study we were in was but dimly lighted by a lamp hanging from the glass-domed ceiling, the flicker of which only showed me after a little search that my companion was nicely ensconced in the folds of an arm-chair. Feeling an involuntary respect for the tall lad since I had witnessed his exhibition of high mettle and tremendous muscular power, I went up to him, believing him still under the influence of terror, and intending to soothe him by a few consoling words.

But Johann needed no consoling words, for he was fast asleep. On approaching him, however, and laying my hand on his shoulder, he started up, and, rubbing his eyes, asked me what had become of his horse and cart, and the potatoes. Having assured him that his horse

and cart were well looked after, and that the potatoes had found their owner, he subsided at once into tranquillity, seemingly persuaded that I, as a relative of Herr Ulrich, had as much right and obligation to take care of his master's property as he himself. The little adventure of killing a man in the street he appeared to have either forgotten, or to think of as a matter much less important than the security of the potatoes.

Feeling curious to get into further acquaintance with my stolid young friend, who, it appeared to me, would make a model soldier, I once more attempted conversation with him, but was as unsuccessful as I had been before. He told me that he was born at Friedenthal, that his parents had sent him to school, and that he had been Herr Ulrich's servant for two years ; but beyond this his mind seemed a perfect blank. He did not appear to know even that he was possessed of extraordinary physical strength ; for on asking him several questions to that effect, he quietly told me that he could lift his master's grey mare over a fence, but adding that there was nothing particular in this, since there was another lad at Friedenthal who could perform the same feat,

with the addition of a boy sitting in the saddle of the horse.

We were yet carrying on our rather dragging dialogue when there resounded quick footsteps in the passage outside, and the next minute the key turned in the lock, and Dr. Schwartz, accompanied by my cousin, entered the room. The first look at Donald showed me that he was not the bearer of any alarming news.

"The fellow has been picked up," he exclaimed, coming close to me, and speaking in an under-tone, "and they have carried him to the hospital; yet there seems no suspicion that there has been an attack upon him. The belief is rife that it is a matter of suicide, as the dagger found in his breast was his own."

"Is he dead?" I asked.

"No, not quite," rejoined my cousin; "but I am told that it is impossible that he can live another hour. Besides the fatal wound in his breast, he has both his legs broken, which those who found him explain by the statement that, after he had stabbed himself, and was lying on the ground, a cart went accidentally over his body."

I could not help a slight tremor coming over me in the reflection what horrible pains the miserable man must endure in his agony, not lessened by the thought of the crimes he had committed in the world he was leaving. Probably Donald guessed the nature of the ideas stirring within me, for, grasping my hand, and pressing it hard, he turned upon me a straight and steadfast look.

"If ever a wretch deserved his doom," he cried, with deep emotion, "it is the man now going to his final account. Leaving alone that he killed my sweet bride, and attempted to murder me, his action as a spy has caused the death of hundreds, if not of thousands. His employers themselves lately became afraid of the man, for they found he was false as a serpent, and it was known that the very dagger he constantly carried with him was poisoned."

"Then it was from his own poisoned dagger that he received his death-wound?" I asked, shuddering.

"Just so: the viper stung by his own tooth!" exclaimed my cousin, glancing up at the lamp above our heads, swinging to and fro, and

emitting a fitful light. "But let us see," he added quickly, "where is the young man that had the daring to close with the monster? He must be an Hercules to have thrown him on the ground in the way he did."

For reply, I pointed to the arm-chair not far behind me. Johann was once more fast asleep, his hands folded across his stomach, the picture of healthy innocence. I thought it cruel to disturb him again, and hinted so in a gesture. But not paying any attention to it, Donald strode up to my travelling companion, and went to shake him by both arms. In an instant Johann was on his feet, and, putting himself face to face with my cousin, made a motion as if intending to give him a lift, in the way he might have done to Herr Ulrich's grey mare. I could not help breaking out into a hearty laugh, which was joined in by Dr. Schwartz, who had been engaged, while we were talking, in arranging the hidden stores under the guardianship of the skeleton. Just at the moment while the little scene was enacted which caused his and my merriment, he brought forth from the cupboard a couple of dishes, placing them on the table in the

middle of the room, and he had no sooner done so, when Johann gave a joyous exclamation.

"There is something to eat. Ja! ja!" he cried, with delightful simplicity, immediately withdrawing his attention from the disturber of his sleep, and bestowing it on the victuals.

Dr. Schwartz again burst out laughing, and neither Donald nor I could help exhibiting our mirth. But, as if ashamed of his want of politeness, our medical friend checked himself almost at the instant, and walking up to Johann, asked him, in the most courteous manner, speaking in an accent exactly like the dialect of the people of Friedenthal, to sit down at the table and help himself.

Johann, who appeared to know Dr. Schwartz, and to feel profound reverence for him, hesitated for a moment; but the next minute, his good appetite overcoming minor scruples, he sat down courageously, and tucking a napkin under his chin, began handling knife and fork with infinite vigour.

"A good example is always worthy of imitation," said the doctor, glancing at me with a smile. "What do you say to taking a plate of caviare,

with a glass of wine, previous to supper, which will not be ready for another hour ? ”

I made no opposition to the proposal, and, sitting down to table, was joined immediately by my cousin and our hospitable entertainer. The latter began by exhibiting a couple of bottles of Johannisberger, informing us, with great inward satisfaction, that his stock was as safe as ever, thanks to the protecting care of the bones of his dear old friend, Dimitri Vassiltchikoff. While filling our glasses, the door of the great glass case containing the Johannisberger swung open, with a slight noise, which seemed to startle Johann, sitting right in front of it. On looking up, and beholding the skeleton, knife and fork fell from his hands.

“Potz-tausend !” he exclaimed. “What is that ?”

“It is a dead man—an old friend of mine !” answered Dr. Schwartz, speaking again in the Friedenthal dialect, and trying hard to appear very serious.

“Ja, ja ! Dead he is, and no mistake,” Johann went on, “but what makes him shake his head ?”

“It’s partly an old habit, for he used to deny

nearly everything," the doctor replied, looking quite grave, "and partly through the head being hung on wires, like Herr Ulrich's light spring cart."

"Potz-tausend!" Johann cried once again, and then, evidently quite satisfied with the answer he had received, took up his knife and fork, and renewed, with undiminished vigour, an attack before commenced upon the remaining portion of a large uncooked Westphalian ham.

"Mens sana in corpore sano!" Dr. Schwartz exclaimed, with an odd glance at Donald; "I would give something to have that young man's intellectual organisation, as well as his digestive powers. Would not you, trübseliger Freund?"

"His stomach appears to be fearfully and wonderfully made, certainly, and a thing to be envied," my cousin replied, looking, I fancied, a shade too solemn; "but as to the accompanying Gehirn, I don't know——"

"I thought," interrupted the doctor, "we two agreed, if upon nothing else, in the opinion that it is necessary for human happiness not to reflect too much, but rather follow the precept of the

Song of Solomon the Wise, 'Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved.' "

"You hit me somewhat too hard with the stick I used on one occasion," cried Donald, in a slightly fretful tone.

"A touch with a stick, even if an imaginary one, may do a deal of good to persons leaning to hypochondria," exclaimed the doctor, a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"No, no! Don't say so," Donald broke forth. "I am not an hypochondriac yet, and never——" He stopped short, listening. Rapid steps were heard coming up the passage leading to our room, and the next minute there was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Dr. Schwartz, to which he received an answer I could not understand. The doctor immediately went to the door, opened it, and let in a middle-aged man, of bronzed features, a Tartar in look and dress. Having exchanged a few words in whispers with the man, evidently his servant, the doctor turned towards us, asking we might excuse his absence for a little while, and then at once left the room, locking as before the door from the outside. I

was rather surprised at the sudden departure, but on expressing fears to Donald that something unpleasant might have happened, was told not to be under any alarm.

"I think our friend is upon no worse errand than attending General Galitzin's consort, and her beautiful niece," my cousin exclaimed with a smile. I was going to ask a question about the lady and her niece, but was interrupted by Johann, who, having finished his Westphalian ham, asked for "*etwas mehr zu essen*."

I quickly fetched a loaf and jar of potted meat from the cupboard, and placed it before him, while Donald threw up his hands in mute wonder, exclaiming, "The lad will kill himself by eating, and the world will lose at one swoop a hero and a *lusus naturæ*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.
This world is not for aye; nor 'tis not strange,
That even our loves should with our fortunes change :
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love."

SHAKESPEARE, *Hamlet*.

HAVING watched for a few minutes, and inwardly marvelled at, the zeal with which Johann was despatching the new supply of victuals set before him, I broke the silence that had come over us by asking my cousin to tell me the particulars of the events that had happened to him since the day when we had been separated by the attack of the Russian infantry, in our flight from Simpheropol.

"It is a very simple affair, and may be told in two words," Donald replied; and then gave me an outline of what I wanted to know. It was that he had been wounded in the head by a

bullet, and after lying in the road for a while, faint and bleeding, had been carried into a neighbouring field, where he was found by Dr. Schwartz, who had managed, with the help of Prince Labanoff, to rescue him, and bring him back to Baktchi-Serai, from which he had not stirred since. My cousin was going on to sing the praises of the doctor, for whom he seemed to cherish the most ardent affection, when I interrupted him.

"How was it," I asked, curious to solve a mystery which Boris had but half explained to me, "how was it that Prince Labanoff and Dr. Schwartz came upon our traces so soon? And furthermore, what motive had the prince, who, as far as I am aware, knew little or nothing either of you or me, to put himself to all the inconvenience, if not danger, incurred in the service he did for us?"

"To your first inquiry I can give an answer," my cousin replied, fixing his eye upon me; "but it is you who have got the key of the second, and not I."

"You speak in riddles. What do you mean?" I ejaculated.

"Have a moment's patience, and I will let you know," rejoined Donald. "The reason we were found so soon by our friend, and the noble protectors who accompanied him, was simply that Prince Labanoff happened to be at Simpheropol at the time of our arrest, sitting at the table in the very room where we were taken prisoners, and that he was on the point of returning to Baktchi-Serai when we broke away, and followed in his carriage in our rear, not far from the Cossacks, our pursuers. According to information I got from Dr. Schwartz, he and Nikita were sitting up late, playing at chess, when the prince came home, announcing what had happened to the two Englishmen, and how they had escaped, expressing at the same time a languid sort of interest in the fate of one of them, as being an acquaintance of his youngest son, but adding to it his conviction that nothing could save us from being seized and shot."

"Then the prince himself never thought of interfering in our behalf?" I interrupted.

"He did not," Donald rejoined, "and I really do not see how any person in his place, being a cool, sensible man of the world, and military

governor to boot, could have acted otherwise with propriety. No, it was that odd, warm-hearted, high-souled friend of ours, embodiment of all that is estimable in human nature, who interfered in our behalf. He would never tell me, and I have only a glimmer of how he managed the affair, which must have been one of exceeding difficulty. All that I have been able to discover, from odds and ends of remarks made, is that it was Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky, or Nikita, as he is commonly called here, who induced the prince, by putting an overwhelming pressure upon him, to set out for our rescue."

"Is it possible?" I exclaimed, a little startled at the information, although not hearing it for the first time; "and what can have induced the count to interest himself so strongly in our behalf?"

"Ah, there I am at the end of my explanation," cried my cousin, "and brought to ask you some questions. But, before doing so, I must tell you a few particulars, imparted to me by that loquacious gentleman, your young friend Boris, which may go towards an elucidation of the riddle. Count Labanoff is possessed of great wealth, while the prince, so his dutiful youngest

son believes, has squandered whatever was once his own, and has got as far in the process as to mortgage the whole of his estates, to the last acre, to Nikita. This will make you understand how the latter was able to do what nobody else could have done with the prince."

"That is clear enough, so far," I interrupted, "but it makes the mystery of Nikita's interference in behalf of a couple of strangers, prisoners of war, and quite beneath the notice of a man as proud as he, all the greater."

"Well, it is you who must solve the riddle," my cousin exclaimed, throwing a watchful glance at me, "Boris tells me that the count, a Nihilist, as you may know, could not be moved to stretch out his little finger, for good or bad, by any individual upon earth, except one. That individual is a young lady with whom he is madly in love, but who does not seem to reciprocate his feelings. She has been staying in this house for some months, with her aunt, the wife of General Galitzin, and Boris believes, and so do I, that none but she can have incited Nikita to throw himself forward, drag the prince with him, and rescue us from imminent death."

Donald paused a moment. "Do you know this young lady, Alec?" he asked; "her Christian name is Bertha, and her title, which she bears in her own right, Countess Nordenstam."

Before my cousin had finished his sentence, I felt the blood mount to my head. He perceived it, and at once exclaimed, "You know the lady, I see, and have thought fit to keep a secret from me, while I hide nothing from you."

"You wrong me, Donald," I cried, stung by the reproach; "I have kept no secret from you, I can assure you; and if I have not told you of this young lady before, it is simply that I had no fitting opportunity. I intended to do so more than once, among others the very evening we met near the Traktir bridge, on the Tchernaya river, when I had left our bivouac for the express purpose of imparting to you what you choose to call my secret."

"And the outpour of my story locked up yours?" my cousin exclaimed, a shadow as of sad remembrance flying over his face.

"So it was!" I replied.

"Then pardon me, Alec," he cried, stretching forth his hand; "but say now what is it that

connects you so mysteriously with this high-born young lady?"

I did as my cousin desired, telling him the whole tale of my adventures, from the moment I saved the fair maiden, whom I now knew as Bertha, from the sea at the foot of Dover cliffs, till I saw her again under the roof of Prince Labanoff's mansion. Donald listened with uninterrupted attention, keeping his eye fixed upon me, with only a side glance now and then towards poor Johann, who had fallen asleep once more in his arm-chair, and was uttering unmelodious noises.

"Is anybody in this house aware of the strange incidents you just told me?" he asked, when I had come to an end.

"Yes, Dr. Schwartz is," I replied, acquainting my cousin with the circumstances under which I had been brought to divulge my story.

Donald paused a moment, deep in reflection. "You may depend," he exclaimed, looking up again, "the doctor has revealed all to Countess Bertha, in his desire to save you and me, which, indeed, was not possible otherwise, as far as I can see."

"It cannot be," I murmured, in a tremor at the renewal of the suggestion first thrown out by Boris.

"I am sure it is as I say!" Donald cried. "But, hark!" he went on, after a moment's silence, while I was sitting lost in thoughts, "what strange noises there are outside, just like the roll of muffled drums!"

Startled from my reverie, I listened attentively, and became aware at once that something unusual was taking place. There was a subdued sound of drums, and the tread of many footsteps within and without the mansion. While I was yet hearkening, there came a sudden rush to our door, and the key turning in the lock, Dr. Schwartz and his Tartar servant flew in.

"The murderer is gone to his account," he exclaimed, almost breathless, "but before dying he has made a false accusation. Come, follow me, or you will be arrested!" And grasping me by the arm, the doctor drew me away, pushing his servant towards Johann, and making a sign to Donald, which the latter replied to by a nod of the head.

We hurried along several dark passages,

emerging at last in an ante-chamber, dimly lighted from the ceiling. Drawing me still after him, Dr. Schwartz hastened to a door at the opposite end, and softly knocked against it. Half a minute elapsed; then it flew open, and a lady in deep mourning appeared on the threshold, close to me. I fell back a step in amazement on beholding her I had saved from the sea.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Eyes of brightest violet, beaming
With the love that knows not shame;
Lips that thrill my inmost being
With the utterance of a name.

"And I bend the knee before her,
As a captive ought to bow :
Pray thee, listen to my pleading,
Sovereign of my soul art thou !"

ATTOUN, *The Buried Flower.*

"LADY BERTHA, I place my prisoner under your gracious protection !" exclaimed Dr. Schwartz, bowing deeply, a scarce perceptible smile overspreading his grave countenance.

She looked at me with a glance which sent the blood coursing through all my veins, and then said, gently, stretching forth her hand : "You are welcome, sir, to my poor protection—no more than due to one who has saved my life at the risk of his own."

The words, uttered in soft, musical tones, with

a faultless English accent, gave me courage to step forward; but when I touched the outstretched hand, and felt it trembling in my own, a sort of faintness came over me. I could not bring a word over my lips, and though conscious that my behaviour was unpardonably awkward and silly, kept silent for a minute, my eyes on the ground.

The untoward suspense was brought to an end by Dr. Schwartz, who exclaimed, with another bow, "I suppose, my lady, your aunt is within?"

"Oh, yes! She is awaiting us," cried Lady Bertha, raising her silvery voice a little higher than before, and, turning round forthwith, made a graceful motion to the doctor and me to follow her.

We passed through a small room into a larger brilliantly lighted apartment, at one end of which, on a velvet-covered ottoman, with a small table in front, sat, in half-reclining posture, an elderly lady, her hair turning into grey, yet of handsome features, a pleasant smile playing around her mouth. Dr. Schwartz seemed on the point of presenting me in due form; but before

he was able to do so, Lady Bertha, by a quick movement, had put herself in front of him.

"My dear aunt, let me introduce to you Mr. Drummond, the preserver of my life," she exclaimed, speaking very slowly, and, as I thought, almost solemnly.

"You are most welcome, sir," the lady replied, in broken English, holding out her hand. "I hope you will excuse me in not rising," she added, "for I am a confirmed invalid, whom all the skill of our friend, Dr. Schwartz, will never more bring to take part in a quadrille."

It was said in such a cheery tone that I felt involuntarily drawn towards the speaker, and replying to the hearty pressure of her hand, began to take courage, and be more at ease.

"You are very kind," I stammered, conscious that I ought to say something, though not unaware at the same time that what I was uttering was terribly commonplace, if not stupid; "You are very kind, and Lady Bertha is very kind."

"Nay, nay; do not say that!" the lady exclaimed, clearly perceiving my embarrassment. "We are fulfilling the plainest duty at this

moment, and the burthen of gratitude is entirely at our side."

"But come," she added, after a moment's pause, while I was standing silent, thinking of what I should say in reply; "come and sit down near me, and be so kind as to tell me something of your military adventures. You must know, I am the most insatiable devourer of stories, and as fond of hearing tales

'Of most disastrous chances,
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hair-breadth 'scapes,'

as was the unfortunate young person who fell in love with and married the Moor of Venice. So please do tell me something." And she pointed to a seat close to her, facing an arm-chair at the other side of the table, occupied by Lady Bertha.

Feeling that it would be churlish to refuse a request thus kindly made, I took the proffered chair, with a grateful look at Dr. Schwartz, who at the same moment sat down near Lady Bertha and began a conversation with her, evidently intended to put me more at ease by diminishing the number of listeners.

Taking courage on beholding the pair of deep

blue eyes, before which my soul quailed, fixed upon the doctor instead of me, I hesitated no longer to start with my narrative, beginning it with the departure of our Light Brigade from Constantinople, and passing rapidly over the short sea voyage and the ride from Varna to Aladyn and Yeni-Bazaar. The story, I felt, was of no striking interest; nevertheless, I was listened to with great attention, which increased as I went on, till at last, having come to the account of our sufferings in the Valley of Death, and the loss of my friend, Sergeant-major Brown, the lady at my side interrupted me by a sudden exclamation.

“Good God, how frightful is war and the horrors that follow in its wake!” she cried, lifting up her hands, and giving me a look which showed that the words were something more than a courteous expression of sympathy.

The conversation of Lady Bertha and Dr. Schwartz, which had been carried on in an under-tone, was brought to an end by the lively outburst of feeling, and both turned round and looked at me, indicating their wish to become hearers of what I had to say. It would have

checked the even flow of my narrative a little previously, but I was now so far engaged in it as not to be able to stop; and having got warm in the recital of my own adventures, I went on with it as if no other eyes but those of Bertha's aunt were looking upon me.

"Please," interrupted the latter, the next minute, "tell me a little more of your friend the sergeant-major: you do not know how much I feel interested in him."

I did as I was bidden, describing, to the best of my power, the death-bed scene of which I was the trembling witness—the terrible gale, the roar of the thunder, the sheets of lightning flashing through the crevices in the tent, and the final utterances of my poor friend in the midst of this tumult of the elements. In the agitation brought on by my own narrative, I all but forgot who were my listeners, and my lips let out a few words referring to the repentance of my dying companion-in-arms for not having given me a letter entrusted to him.

"Who sent that letter?" Lady Bertha cried suddenly, with flushed cheek, rising on her seat.

I felt overwhelmed with confusion, and for a

few seconds remained speechless, till the question was repeated, "Who sent that letter? Pray, tell me."

"It was—that is, I was told that it was—the lady I was fortunate enough to save," I stammered.

"Then you never received the note I wrote to you, nor that from my father in which it was enclosed?" Lady Bertha exclaimed, bending forward over the table, her face crimson with blushes.

"I never received a letter either from you or from your father," I replied, rising likewise, with a feeling as if the room was whirling around me.

There was a moment's deep silence, interrupted by nothing but the faint clamour of far-off voices, and a strange sound, as of discordant trumpets. Apparently intending to break the oppressive stillness in our apartment, Dr. Schwartz said something about troops passing by; but he had not uttered more than a dozen words when the clang of heavy footsteps was heard in the adjoining room, followed by the call of a loud voice.

"It is my husband, Bertha!" cried the lady on the sofa near me; "go and open the door."

The request was obeyed at once, and the door flying back, let in a stout, elderly man, of middle height, with a good-humoured though not by any means handsome face. He was clad in the richly embroidered uniform of a Russian field-officer, leaving no doubt, even if the lady's words had not told it, that he was the General Galitzin of whom I had heard before.

Having come into the room, the general remained for an instant on the threshold, as if examining the inmates. But before he had finished his survey, his consort began to address him, as it seemed to me, in rather sharp tone.

"How is it, sir," she exclaimed, speaking French, and half rising on her couch, "that you come here, after having given your promise not to disturb my privacy?"

"Je ne savais pas, madame! Vraiment, je ne pouvais pas—" stuttered the general, evidently shrinking before the flashing eye of his wife. She interrupted him before he could finish his sentence.

"C'est assez!" she cried, in a tone of mingled

softness and energy, sounding strangely impressive; "there is no need of long explanations on your part, inasmuch as I can tell you beforehand all that I have to say. It is, simply, that if you allow any stranger, soldier or police-officer, to come near the apartments occupied by me and Bertha, I shall order my carriage, and retire to my estates. Dieu merci, je suis encore maîtresse, et de moi, et de ma fortune."

General Galitzin stood dumb, staring at his wife, as if trying to discover whether she could be fully in earnest. Her keen, clear look, untroubled by either smile or frown, probably told him that her will was not behind her words, and assuming a deferential air, and coming a step forward, he began to address her in a pleading tone.

"Mais, madame, je risque beaucoup!" he exclaimed.

He was again interrupted. "Vous risquez!" she cried, a shadow as of disdain flitting across her calm features. "Eh bien! risquez, ou ne risquez pas, comme vous voulez!" And she rested her head on her arm, and, leaning down, resumed her former position.

The general stood silent for a moment. Then, stepping slowly forward, his sword rattling on the ground, he went to the side of the couch, bent down, and kissed his wife on the forehead. She looked up at him, and I fancied I saw a tear glistening in her eye. Responding to the glance, he seized her hand, imprinted another kiss on it, and then marched towards the door by which he had entered, without uttering a word.

I felt infinitely touched by the scene I had witnessed, but not the less under extreme embarrassment. It was evident that Dr. Schwartz was sharing it with me, and wishing to leave the room, for the moment after the general was gone, he went to address his consort.

"Would you, my lady, give your gracious permission," he said, bowing lowly, "to let my young friend retire to the chamber which you will kindly allow him to occupy until further arrangements can be made. He has had a long journey to-day, besides going through much excitement, and must be very tired."

The lady inclined her head, while fixing her eyes upon me, with a pleasant smile. "I feel truly sorry to give up your friend thus early,"

she replied, "but it seems my assigned lot is to be always disappointed, for I was cherishing hopes to spend a long evening in listening to the continuance of a story which has interested me more than I can tell you. However, I am not so selfish as to seek my own pleasure in the discomfort of others: therefore, adieu!"

She stretched forth her hand to me, and I, touching the tips of her fingers, bowed and withdrew. Looking round, I could not for an instant see Lady Bertha, and the thought that she had fled without even speaking a word, made me feel on a sudden oppressed with melancholy. But it only lasted a minute. Following in the steps of Dr. Schwartz, on a sign made by him, I went across to the other side of the apartment, towards a door not before observed, opposite to that by which we had entered. There, half-hidden in the shadow of a large picture, occupying the wall from the ground to the ceiling, stood she.

While the doctor was opening the door for me to pass through, she put forth her hand, exclaiming, so softly as to be scarce audible, "Good night!"

I looked up, and our eyes met. It was but the glance of a moment, but seemed to sink like burning fire into my soul. I touched her hand, and then staggered forward into the next room, trembling, bewildered, enraptured, full of unspeakable joy.

CHAPTER XX.

"Love, strong in wish, is weak in reason, still!
Forming a thousand ills which ne'er shall be,
And, like a coward, kills itself to-day
With fancied grief, for fear it die to-morrow."

SEWELL, *Raleigh*.

"THERE is nothing more admirable in this country, and more deserving of praise," said Dr. Schwartz, taking me by the arm, and drawing me forward a few steps, "than the good old fashion of placing refreshments, both solid and fluid, in every room, to be taken ad libitum. Life, with all its charms, becomes a burden if we must eat when we have no appetite, and can get nothing to drink when we are thirsty. Nicht wahr, mein Freund?"

I heard the words, and understood the meaning, with a dim notion that I ought to make some sort of reply; but everything nevertheless seemed confused to me, and I felt altogether

uncertain whether the doctor was jesting with me or speaking seriously. He, on his part, appeared little bent on making my judgment clearer, for having busied himself for several minutes to arrange a number of dishes, glasses, and bottles on a large sideboard, while I stood looking on in dreamy meditation, he came to shake me by the hand.

“Good-bye, for to-day,” he cried, “and let me hope you will enjoy your supper. It is a cold collation, but not a bad one, either as to quality or quantity, and prepared after certain gastronomic principles laid down by my late respected friend Dimitri Vassiltchikoff.”

I looked into the face of Dr. Schwartz while he was speaking, to see once more whether he was bent upon fun, but could not perceive a trace of it. His features were imperturbably solemn, and not the slightest twinkle in his clear blue eyes denoted that he was discussing other than the gravest subjects.

“Must you leave so soon?” I exclaimed, after a second’s pause, “I should be very glad indeed if you could stop a moment longer, and give me some explanation——”

"Pardon me, mein lieber Freund," interrupted the doctor; "I am excessively sorry, but I really must go, having pressing engagements, otherwise nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to help you to drink one of those bottles of Rüdesheimer that stand so temptingly before us, and at the same time to have a little pleasant chat. But as to explanations, I am afraid I should have none to give, even if I had time to stop."

"I only wanted to know," I broke in, "whether this——"

"Du guter Himmel!" interposed Dr. Schwartz, more quickly than before, "if you would but drink your Rüdesheimer in peace, and leave explanations alone. Believe me, mein Freund, that everything explains itself in time if you have patience, and your anxiety will only interfere with your digestion."

Dreamy as I felt, it was no longer possible for me to misunderstand the doctor's words and behaviour, and seizing his hand, I bid him good-bye, inquiring, previously, whether Donald was quite safe.

"Your cousin is in perfect safety," was the

rejoinder, "and, I doubt not, in philosophic tranquillity of mind—the latter a blessing which I should be glad to see possessed by others to the same degree."

Smiling, Dr. Schwartz gave me a last shake of the hand, and the next moment the door closed behind him, and I was left alone.

I sat down in a chair, and tried to engage in reflections upon all that had happened to me within the last few hours. My heart was still beating under violent excitement, and there was but one object before my imagination. The knowledge that I had escaped a great danger, imprisonment, if not death, scarcely occupied my mind, for all my thoughts were concentrated upon the fact of having met Lady Bertha, of having looked full into and trembled under the light of her deep blue eyes, of having felt the pressure of her soft warm hand. Emotions deep and unutterable went chasing each other as I reflected, again and again, over all that had passed, until I felt as if my soul was sinking and losing itself in a world of bliss. It was love—love all-powerful, such as I had never known before, which was overflowing my whole being,

which my senses as yet could scarcely comprehend, and for which my tongue had no name.

All was silence within and without. The lamp on the table was shedding a feeble light, and fitful shadows went sweeping across the room, dancing on the picture-hung walls, and halting now and then on the painted ceiling above my head. I paced up and down the apartment till feeling oppressed with weariness, and then threw myself on a couch and closed my eyes.

The ecstatic feeling of rapture was now vanishing fast, and gloomy dejection came to take possession of my mind. Again I set to dream and meditate, but the rainbow colours had fled from the picture of my imagination, and there was nothing left behind but dark, starless night. What idiot was I, the voice of reason whispered to me, to fall in love with a being removed from me an infinite distance by rank and wealth, and all the thousand barriers set up within the pale of civilised society. She a high-born countess, radiant in beauty, with noble worshippers at her feet; and I a common soldier, a prisoner of war, escaped from a dungeon, sentenced to death, and liable at any moment to be arrested and shot.

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My hot brain, throbbing under the pressure of fierce mental anguish, seemed as if ready to burst as I reflected upon my position, and a racking pain went shooting through all my limbs. Falling more and more the prey of melancholy thoughts, I hid my burning face in the pillows of the couch, trying to get an hour's quiet slumber, and forget my misery. But sleep refused to come, the very stillness of all things around adding to my inward excitement, allowing one dismal picture after the other to creep up in the sombre flights of my imagination.

The deep silence was getting oppressive like a nightmare, when all on a sudden it was broken by the sound of bugles, and the clatter of a detachment of cavalry that seemed approaching the house. The bugles ceased after a little while, and I fancied I could hear the men descending from their horses; but while I was yet listening attentively, the door of my apartment flew open, and I saw before me once more Dr. Schwartz.

"I did not think I should have to disturb you so soon again," he cried, coming up to me, with an evident expression of alarm in his face, "but I

see you have not been asleep, and therefore, perhaps, you do not mind the interruption."

"No! I am very glad you have come," I replied; "but has anything happened?"

"Another body of troops has arrived," the doctor exclaimed, hurriedly, "and surrounded the mansion; every portion of it, not excepting the ladies' apartments, will be closely searched as soon as it is daylight."

"Then escape is impossible, I suppose?" remarked I, feeling quite calm at the announcement, not impressed for the moment by the shadow of fear of either imprisonment or death.

"Nothing is impossible!" Dr. Schwartz cried, with some impatience; "and if you will only allow yourself to be guided, all will be right yet. The extraordinary efforts made to apprehend you, and your cousin with you, are due to General Liprandi, who had conceived an unaccountable affection for the miscreant accidentally killed by his own dagger, and who on his death-bed, in the presence of a number of officers, declared you to be his assassin. The false denunciation, it seems, is believed in by the otherwise shrewd commander, and his wrath is so great, that

neither Prince Labanoff, nor his relative, General Galitzin, are further able to protect their family dwelling from being searched from top to bottom. There is only one man near us influential enough to prevent it, and to save you and Donald."

"And who is that?" I inquired.

"It is Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky," replied the doctor, looking me full in the face, with a searching glance.

I felt strangely touched on hearing the name, and a crowd of thoughts and recollections, bitter and sad, came rushing through my mind. Beholding me silent, Dr. Schwartz came closer to me, laying his hand on my shoulder.

"Hear me, mein Freund," he exclaimed, with much solemnity of manner, "Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky has once before rescued you from imminent danger at the intercession of a young lady, and that intercession I can procure again if you wish, and it will be, I am certain, as effectual as ever. But I have good cause for desiring that this time the young lady should not interfere, but that you yourself should make your appearance before the count, and ask him, face to

face, as one man asks another, to assist you in your need."

"That I cannot!" I interrupted.

"Then I must go again to the lady," quickly rejoined the doctor, "for I am determined you shall not perish, even though you wish it."

I felt my heart beating violently, and my feet tremble under me. Again the doctor seized my hand, and keeping it in his, exclaimed, in a tone of compassion, "I would not ask you to go to the count if there was a chance of help to be found anywhere else. But there is not. He is a favourite of the Imperial Grand Dukes now at Sebastopol, and he alone, partly on this account, and partly through his personal influence, has sufficient power over General Liprandi to stay his design of having you arrested and shot. Once more then, will you do what I advise?"

"On what ground can I ask the count to stretch out his hand once more in my favour?" I stammered, scarce knowing what to say.

"On the simple ground of justice!" Dr. Schwartz cried, energetically; "you need only give him the plain account of the way in which that bad man who denounced you came by his

death, and he, believing you, as I have not the slightest doubt, will repeat the same to his friend, General Liprandi, and thus prevent the committal of a real murder."

The doctor made a pause, as if expecting an answer, but seeing me remain silent, continued, "Your hesitation probably springs from that you know little of the true character of Count Labanoff. His outward coldness is not so much the result of the absolute unbelief, or Nihilism, which he affects, but of a boundless pride. After much opportunity to study the workings of his mind, I have come to the conclusion that he belongs to a class of men typified by your great poet, Lord Byron. I will not assert for a moment that he has the least affection for you, and it may be even that he dislikes you, but I feel sure nevertheless that if you speak to him, frankly and openly, he will not let you fall a victim to military despotism."

A sudden reflection passed through my head. "You wish me to speak frankly," I interrupted, "but I shall have difficulty to do so unless I receive the solution of an incident I am not able to understand. It is the circumstance of having

been sent away, with great abruptness, from this house immediately after my first entrance."

The doctor drew back a little, and I fancied that a slight frown of displeasure was gathering on his brow. "Your inquiry is far-reaching!" he murmured.

"If I have asked too much, pray let me retract my question," said I.

"No, no! I do think, after all, you have a right to inquire," Dr. Schwartz cried, coming forward, and seizing my hand once more. "It is a plain confession I have to make," he continued, with slow utterance; "when I first learnt from your lips that it was you who had saved the life of our Lady Bertha, I hurried you away under the fear that a personal acquaintance between you could only be productive of unhappiness on both sides. Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky was then trying, with the approbation of her father, to gain Bertha's love, and my impression was that the affection was mutual. But I was entirely wrong in my surmise. I was wrong also, as I have since discovered, in believing that the contemplated marriage would restore the fallen fortunes of the family of Prince Labanoff,

through the breaking of old mortgages, and complicated settlements. There were still other reasons why the union between Nikita and Lady Bertha seemed desirable, but the whole of them fell to the ground at the decease of her father."

"Then her father is dead!" I ejaculated, in great surprise.

"Her deep mourning might have told you so at first sight," rejoined Dr. Schwartz; "Count Nordenstam lost his life during the terrific hurricane of the fourteenth of November last, when the vessel which carried him across the sea of Azov, from Taganrog to the mouth of the Don, was lost, with every soul on board. The event made Lady Bertha, his only child, already motherless, the possessor of a vast fortune, and the absolute mistress of her own actions."

The doctor hesitated, as if about to say something more, but irresolute whether he should speak or not. At last he broke out, "You understand, then, that Countess Bertha Nordenstam does not respond to the feelings entertained towards her by Count Labanoff, and on this account, if on no other, I hesitate to request her to be once more the medium of intercession with him. But

I shall most assuredly do so if you are obstinate in refusing to plead for yourself, for she would never forgive me if I acted otherwise."

"Never forgive you: what do you mean?"
I stammered, trembling with emotion.

Dr. Schwartz fixed his keen bright eyes upon me for a second, and then exclaimed slowly, but in decisive tone, "What I mean is that Bertha loves you."

The words struck a new chord of bliss in my heart, and overwhelmed by the tumult of my excited senses, I felt as if giddy, and staggered forward a step towards the doctor. He put both his hands upon my shoulder, and drawing me towards him, said softly, "Will you speak to Count Labanoff, or must I ask Bertha?"

"I am ready to go," I cried.

CHAPTER XXI.

"All other passions have their hour of thinking,
And hear the voice of reason. This alone
Breaks at the first suspicion into frenzy,
And sweeps the soul in tempest."

FRANCIS, *Constantine*.

DR. SCHWARTZ for a moment looked full into my eyes, and then, without uttering another word, turned round, making a sign for me to follow him. Treading in his steps, I passed again through the apartment where I had met Bertha and her aunt, and not without emotion looked upon the seat she had occupied, and the spot where I had felt the pressure of her hand. Silence and obscurity now were reigning everywhere, a small lamp only shedding a dim light, scarce sufficient to see our way. Having crossed the room, and the adjoining chamber, the doctor listened for an instant at the threshold, as if to discover whether there were any persons moving about. But everything was quiet like the

grave, and we passed on through a long passage, at the end of which my guide knocked at and then threw open a door. Entering, I found myself in the presence of Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky. He was sitting at a small table, engaged in a game of chess with his young relative, my friend Boris.

The latter, as soon as he perceived me, arose and came running up to me, shaking my hands with much warmth, and expressing his pleasure to meet me again. While I was answering the compliment, Dr. Schwartz went up to the count, speaking for a few minutes in Russian, but receiving no reply. Then, turning towards Boris, he held up a finger, exclaiming, "Incorrigible!"

"I suppose I am incorrigible," Boris broke out, in French; "but really this time the misdemeanour of sitting up late, and converting night into day, must not be laid at my door, but at that of Nikita, who absolutely compelled me to stick to the chessboard, with no better result to me than of losing one game after the other."

"I accept the excuse, but on the condition that you retire at once to rest," the doctor

rejoined gravely ; "it is long past midnight, and I am certain Prince Labanoff will be greatly displeased should he learn that you do not attend to the promise you made to keep earlier hours."

"*Merci bien !* A stern lecture !" exclaimed Boris, with a laugh ; "but I obey your dictates, the more willingly as I feel very sleepy, and it is but a step to my pillow. Therefore, *adieu !*"

Boris shook hands once more with me, and having made a mock salute to Dr. Schwartz, and another to Nikita, disappeared in the darkness of a recess at the further end of the apartment.

Nikita, during the time of the short conversation, had not directed a glance towards me, but his young relative being gone, he languidly raised his eyes, and, with a fixed stare at me, exclaimed, "Do you play chess?"

"I do," I replied.

"May I ask you then to do me the favour of taking the place of Boris, and playing out the game which he has left unfinished?" the count continued, in somewhat drawling tone.

I expressed my willingness to do as asked, and at once went to the table, and took my seat.

While I was examining the state of the game, which had little more than commenced, Dr. Schwartz stepped forward, addressing Nikita, this time in English.

"There is little time to lose, I am afraid," he exclaimed, "and if you would have the goodness to enter at once upon the discussion of——"

"Discussion!" interrupted Nikita, "I do not see that there is the least need for discussion. What you have told me is quite sufficient, and I am full willing to do what I can for your protégé." The count laid marked stress upon the last two words, accompanying them by a singular glance at me.

Dr. Schwartz appeared unpleasantly touched by the remark, and stood silent for a moment. When on the point of opening his lips again, he was once more interrupted by Nikita.

"Perhaps you are right in advising to lose no time," he remarked, in the former drawling tone, "and I will therefore write at once a note to Liprandi, which you can despatch by your servant." Without waiting for a reply, the count went to a writing desk close at his back, and rapidly penned a letter, which he sealed with

a ring on his finger, and then handed to Dr. Schwartz.

"I will see that the note is forwarded at once, and the answer, if there is any, be sent to you," the doctor exclaimed. Then making a formal bow to Nikita, with an earnest side-look at me, he slowly walked towards the door, which the next moment closed behind him.

"We can begin the game afresh, if you like," was the first thing Nikita said, after the doctor had left; "Boris has already lost a pawn, and therefore you are at a disadvantage."

"I do not mind it," I rejoined, "and am ready to commence."

The count glanced up from the chessboard, over which his eyes had been running, and turned a scrutinising look upon me. I bore it quietly, asking, after a moment's pause, "Who has the first move?"

"It's mine!" cried Nikita, with some animation; and having hastily fixed his eyes again on the chessboard, he took up the King's Knight, and placed it so as to threaten my Queen, uttering at the same time the usual formula of "*gardez la Reine!*"

It was far from a good move, and replying to it I obtained some advantage, which led, after a few minutes, to my capturing the Knight. The loss of his piece seemed to vex the count a little, and bringing forward his other Knight, more hastily than before, he again went to attack my Queen. The result was the same as in the first instance, for in a few counter-moves I easily defeated his object, and again made a prize of the Piece.

"You are a better player than I expected to find in a successor of Boris," he cried, with visible irritation, "but, being a master of the game, you might show your pluck by coming forward to the attack, instead of keeping merely on the defensive."

"I leave the attack to you, sir," I replied, bowing to my opponent.

"Soit!" he exclaimed, and then called out once more "*gardez la Reine!*" this time pushing forward with the King's Bishop, and commencing a game of gambit. There was no difficulty, with the advantages already gained, of keeping my opponent at bay, defeating his successive designs, and at the end of less than half an hour, having taken his King's Bishop and Rook, besides the

two Knights, I was enabled to bid in return "gardez la Reine!" The next move gave me the Queen; but I had no sooner taken the captured Piece, when Nikita threw up the game.

"I hate being checkmated bit by bit," he cried, in almost angry tone, "will you allow me to play en revanche, commencing a fresh game?"

"With the greatest pleasure," I made haste to reply, anxious to diminish, as far as was in my power, the irritation that had taken possession of the count, and which seemed to increase every minute. It was so great as to make him appear almost an opposite character to that he had shown himself when I made first his acquaintance. He then was wrapped in proud indifference, as if dwelling on the mountain heights of 'Nil admirari,' and now fumed and fretted like a child for no other apparent reason than losing a game of chess.

"Gardez la Reine!" the count cried once more, having made a King's Knight opening, and then commencing another gambit. The move, coming from a practised player, was so bad that I could not help uttering a little exclamation of surprise.

"You had better reconsider the attack upon my Queen," I ventured to observe.

The count looked up from the chessboard, and his dark eyes seemed to flash fire. "I want no lessons, sir," he cried, almost fiercely; "*gardez la Reine!*"

There was something in the tone of voice that stung me; nevertheless, I did not feel in the least excited, but, on the contrary, was calmer than I had been for a long time. I dimly fancied the count intended to fix a quarrel upon me, and I was determined to avoid it, deeply conscious of the gratitude I owed to him, and to the noble family whose guest I had become. Still under the impression that the scarcely dissembled anger of my opponent at the chessboard was owing mainly, if not entirely, to the fact of his having lost a game, I tried to soothe him by playing even more carelessly than he, so as to give him a good chance of redeeming his defeat. But the result was far from what I expected.

"What do you mean by not taking my Rook?" suddenly exclaimed Nikita, on my making a designedly wrong move, to obviate the necessity of capturing one of his superior Pieces; "have you come to treat me as a dolt?"

It was necessary to plead an oversight, and

seeing the turn things were taking, I thought it best to leave off giving advantages, and play as I had done before. The consequence was that, in less time than it had taken before, I again got the upper hand in the game, with an unavoidable victory staring me in the face. To finish the play, now more a torment than a diversion to me, I pushed my Queen and other Pieces rapidly forward to the final check.

I had just called out "Checkmate!" when there was a knock at the door, and a servant entered, bringing a letter on a silver tray.

The count's face grew alternately pale and purple as his eyes flew over the note. He seemed to read it twice over, and then arose from his seat. I followed his example.

"It appears," he exclaimed slowly, with his dark eyes upon me, "that the doctor's demand to interfere in your favour was a mere mockery upon me. Both you and he seem to think me a fit subject for sport."

"I do not understand you, sir," I exclaimed, Count Labanoff making a pause, as if expecting a reply from me.

"Oh, you do not understand! Is it that?" he

cried, coming a step nearer to me: "Well, then I must tell you. There is a lady living under this roof, whose hand was promised to me by her father, and whom I expected to be my wife, who has forgotten her name, her birth, her rank, and her duty, so far as to run after a foreign adventurer, a common soldier."

"Sir, I do not mind what you say of me, nor what you think," I interrupted, "but do not insult a lady whom you profess to love."

"My fine fellow, do not give yourself unnecessary airs!" Nikita broke forth, purple in the face, yet trying to articulate calmly; "whether you yourself knew it beforehand or not, is of very little import to me, but I must tell you that I consider it a personal disgrace that a lady whom I look upon as my betrothed should go in the middle of the night to General Liprandi to be your advocate."

"Bertha!" I ejaculated, in boundless surprise, "has she been to General Liprandi?"

"Oh, she is already your familiar Bertha!" the count burst out, trembling with excitement; "Well! *Nous marchons vite!* Yes, my good man, the Lady Bertha, as I call her, has been to General Liprandi, and, pleading in your favour, with all

the warmth natural to her romantic disposition, has obtained not only the withdrawal of the troops from this house, but a provisional pardon for you, with liberty to go wherever you like."

I stood speechless. The sudden announcement of so much devotion fell upon me like a flood of sunshine, arousing emotions so delicious and overpowering as to stir the depths of my inmost soul. For a moment I quite lost sight of the angry rival that stood before me, feeling inclined rather to look upon him as a dear friend than an enemy. But Count Labanoff did not allow me to revel long in the blissful sensations which his words had stirred within me.

"You must answer to me for your conduct in this matter!" he exclaimed, drawing nearer to me, his voice sinking to a half-whisper; "I am no aristocrat of the English type, hiding under parchments and pedigrees, and will meet you as one man meets another who has sullied his honour."

"Your honour has never been sullied by me," I replied, calmly encountering the wrathful look of the count.

He scarcely allowed me to speak, interrupting, "Will you meet me, or not?"

"I cannot accept your challenge," I replied, keeping my eye fixedly upon his.

"Then you are a coward, and I will treat you as such!" shouted the count, at the same time uplifting his hand as if to strike me.

My studied composure was all at an end, and the hot blood kept shooting into my head. "Dare not to touch me!" I cried, raising my arm in self-defence.

Nikita fell back a step, making a gesture of contempt. "I do not want any of your miserable boxing, valorous invention of a nation of shopkeepers," he broke out; "but I ask you once more, and for the last time, will you meet me in the field as a man, or must I chastise you as a poltroon in the presence of Lady Bertha?"

"I will meet you!" I exclaimed.

"Good!" rejoined the count. "Pistols, or swords? And when?"

"I leave time and weapons to your choice," said I.

"You are polite!" cried Nikita, with a stiff bow; "Not to lose time in formalities, let us say pistols, and go to work immediately."

"I accept, and am quite ready!" I rejoined.

Count Labanoff inclined his head, and walking to a sideboard, opened a drawer, and took out a case of pistols, with powder flask, and a packet of bullets. "You allow me to lead the way," he exclaimed, walking towards the door and beckoning me to follow. Crossing the threshold, I fancied I saw the slender figure of Boris in the dark recess at the other end of the apartment.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Few things, in this so surprising world, strike me with more surprise. Two little visual spectra of men, hovering with insecure enough cohesion in the midst of the Unfathomable, to dissolve therein, at any rate, very soon, make pause at the distance of twelve paces asunder, whirl round, and, simultaneously, by the cunningest mechanism, explode one another into dissolution, and off-hand become air, and non-existent. Dence on it, the little spitfires!"—CARLYLE, *Sartor Resartus*.

I FELT more than ordinarily calm and collected when following in the steps of Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky, with the prospect before me of engaging in a duel, and perhaps losing my life. The fulness of the conviction that I was beloved by one whose sweet image had long been haunting my soul, and was filling my heart with mute worship, subdued and annulled all other ideas, and as I was walking behind the count, through long silent corridors and across rows of dimly-lighted apartments, my memory and my imagination were entirely with Bertha. If I thought of the

object of our march at all, it was that it appeared to me eminently puerile, and there was a lurking idea in my brain that the person striding along, with heavy step, in front of me, was bent upon nothing more than a little diversion.

The first words of Nikita contributed not a little to establish the half-formed opinion. Having made our way through a great many rooms and passages, and down a winding staircase, we emerged at last in a small courtyard, and from thence got into a garden, full of high trees. It seemed that now, for the first time, the count made the discovery that it was night, and very foggy, for he expressed astonishment at the fact.

“What shall we do?” he exclaimed, “there is not light enough to see each other’s faces, even at five yards.”

The lament, uttered in the quavering tone of irritation my companion had assumed before, appeared to me quite comical; but I checked a disposition to laugh, and replied, with as much gravity as I could assume, that if the darkness would not allow us to see each other at five yards, we might be able to do so at one-half, or a third of the distance.

"Then you wish to kill me!" quickly interrupted Nikita, "for you know that the first shot is yours!"

"I have not the least desire to take your life," I replied, in serious tone; "and as proof of it I may tell you that I intend firing in the air, in case you insist upon an encounter of arms which appears to me entirely uncalled for, and, if you will allow me to say so, absurd."

"You may have your own opinions on that subject," rejoined the count, drily, "but, as I understand it, you have accepted my challenge, and I trust you do not mean to back out of it at the last moment."

"I have been trained, as a soldier, not to run away from an adversary, but take my stand in any fair encounter," I replied, my blood getting up a little, "and I beg to assure you that there will be no exception in this instance."

"But you told me this moment that you did not mean to fire at me!" exclaimed the count.

"Such truly is my intention," I answered, "which I will justify merely by the statement that I deem myself under too great obligation to you, for having acted as my protector, and if I

have been rightly informed, saved my life, to think of raising up my hand against you, under any circumstances whatever."

"You appear to forget that the challenge came from me," interrupted Count Labanoff, "so that whatever scruples you may have on the score of what you call obligations, are wiped off thereby."

The words were uttered in a harsh, grating tone, showing a sort of fixed determination on the part of my antagonist not to let his anger be conquered by any conciliatory remarks I might make.

I felt half inclined for the moment to imitate the count's haughty tone; however, the loving image of Bertha still engrossed my mind to the extent as to allow no feeling of wounded pride to creep up in it. After a few minutes' silence, while Nikita was standing irresolute, as if reflecting where to fight the duel upon which he was bent, I made one more attempt to subdue the wrathful passion into which he had worked himself, very absurdly in my opinion.

"As you will not accept the plea of gratitude, which forbids me aiming a pistol at you," I exclaimed, drawing near to the count, and speak-

ing very slowly, "perhaps you will allow me to bring forward another reason, of an entirely unsentimental character. When I had the honour of a conversation with you for the first time, you declared, with much warmth, that the charge of the British cavalry on the field of Balaclava, in which I took a part, was utterly foolish and irrational, and that had you been in the Light Brigade, you would have protested against being led into a battle the odds of which were so uneven as to make it certain to become a mere carnage. Now I am under the impression that the encounter which you desire to bring on places me precisely in the position of the, according to you, irrationally-acting Light Brigade, with, if anything, much higher odds against me, as an individual."

"What do you mean, sir?" the count broke forth; "I am unable to see that the odds are against you, but, on the contrary, believe that they are entirely in your favour, since you, being challenged, have the right of the first shot."

"Well, sir, suppose I make use of my right, and, aiming carefully, kill you: what will happen in that case?" I asked, speaking with great

deliberation, and looking fixedly, as much as the darkness allowed, upon my adversary.

"What will happen?" he rejoined, in somewhat perplexed tone; "why, you have killed me in fair duel, and there's an end of it."

"Indeed, you think so?" I went on; "you think that your powerful friends, commanders of armies, will not say a word on learning that you have been shot by an obscure prisoner of war, in an encounter at which there were no witnesses, and which only the word of the survivor can prove not to have been an assassination?"

Count Labanoff was silent for a minute or two, evidently at a loss how to answer the question I had made. He then exclaimed, in an off-hand manner, "If you wish, I will summon a couple of my servants to act as witnesses."

"I do not wish it," I replied, "for the case I put is merely argumentative, and I must repeat that my determination is fixed not to fire at you."

"It seems to me your only desire is to back out of the duel," cried the count, in sneering tone.

Again I felt my blood getting hot, and the

quick reply burst from my lips, "I do not know what gives you the right to accuse me of cowardice, unless the presumption of rank and wealth."

The count took a step forward, so as to be almost face to face with me, and exclaimed fiercely, "Enough of words! Are you ready?"

"Quite!" I rejoined.

"I propose," he went on, "that we go to the bottom of the garden, where there is a little more light than here, and fire, first at twelve paces, and, if no result follows, at half the distance. Do you agree to that?"

"I agree!" was my reply.

"Let us go then!" cried Nikita; and he marched rapidly down the broad alley in which we had been standing, I keeping close to his side. A few minutes' walk brought us to a sloping lawn, bordered by a live hedge at its further end. Without uttering another word, the count opened his pistol-case, and took out two six-barrelled revolvers, and having charged them with powder and balls, offered me the choice. I accepted the nearest weapon, upon which Nikita, still silent, counted off twelve paces, parallel with the

hedge, and then placed himself at one end of the measured distance, leaving me at the other.

Although we had quitted the shade of the high trees, and the dense fog underneath, it was still so dark that I was quite unable to see the face of my antagonist, and could barely distinguish his body, looming forth as a dim grey shadow through the mist. Scarcely knowing what to do, and still, almost unconsciously, clinging to the idea that I was but taking part in a play, I kept standing quietly at the post assigned to me, not under the least excitement, but feeling very much as if once more on picket before Sebastopol, with nothing particular to do but to await the sunrise, and return to camp.

I had stood so for about five minutes, when the voice of my antagonist resounded through the fog with "Are you ready?"

"Yes, I am ready!" I responded.

"Then fire!" he cried.

I lifted up my revolver, and discharged it high into the air.

The count, evidently unaware that I had kept to the declaration I had made not to take aim, shouted out, as soon as I had fired, "You have

missed: it is my turn now!" The words were scarcely from his lips when a bullet came hissing close past my face, not more than a few inches off, to judge by the sound.

Deeming it unnecessary to proclaim aloud the result of my opponent's shooting, and to constitute myself a sort of target-marker to my own person, I remained standing in the position I was in, as quietly as before. But a second had scarcely elapsed, when Count Labanoff exclaimed in an excited tone, "For God's sake, are you hit?"

"No, not that I am aware of!" I replied, half inclined to laugh.

The count's demeanour, apparently full of sorrow the moment he thought he had inflicted a wound, instantly changed at my words. "Then we must draw nearer to each other, as arranged," he cried, with the tone of a man sternly bent on going through a prescribed course of duty. Not making the shortest pause, he forthwith proceeded to measure off six paces, and then placed himself stiff upright, with his arms hanging at his side. At the diminished distance, the course of a bullet, unless wilfully misdirected, was be-

coming fatally certain, for although the prevailing darkness did not yet allow me to see the features, the body of my antagonist stood out clearly marked against the grey mist.

"If I were to take aim at you now, it would be mere murder," I exclaimed, having stood quiet for a minute, and then giving vent to a feeling I could not control.

"Enough of talk: fire! I say, fire!" the count shouted, as if getting furious at the delay.

The wrath of my adversary only had the effect of rendering me more calm and collected; and deeper than ever impressed with the madness of his actions and purpose, I almost began to pity him. Another minute elapsed, and I was on the point of addressing him once more, when he broke forth, his voice sounding like a shriek, "Fire! or you are a coward!"

"The word coward sits lightly upon me, but I will fire to give you your turn," I replied, speaking as quietly as I could. Then lifting up my revolver, I discharged it over the hedge, at my right hand side.

The smoke had scarcely dispersed, when the count raised his weapon. I saw him aim care-

fully, and then pull the trigger. There was a flash, and at the instant I felt a bullet enter my left shoulder.

As before when he had fired, the count came up to me, but with slower step, asking, "Are you hit?"

"Slightly," I replied.

"Where?" he went on asking, and on being told it was in the left shoulder, offered to bandage the wound.

I fancied there was a sort of mockery in the tone in which he made the offer, which made me decline it immediately.

"There is no need of bandages," I exclaimed, with stubborn pride, while a warm stream of blood was flowing down my body, and the wounded arm was sinking powerless at my side.

"Let us continue, then, at the same distance, if you please," cried Nikita, measuring off again his six paces.

I stood quiet for a moment, beginning to feel a little faint from loss of blood, but was roused by the cry of my adversary, "Fire!"

Mechanically, I raised my revolver into the

air, and discharged it once more over the hedge at my right-hand side.

Quickly as before, as soon as the whiff of smoke had sunk to the ground, the count lifted his weapon, and again began to take careful aim. I fancied he was about to draw the trigger, when the sound of hurried steps came up the garden, with a number of lights flitting close behind.

"We are surprised!" ejaculated Nikita, turning in the direction of the intruders, but keeping outstretched his arm holding the revolver.

It was pushed aside the next moment by a dark figure, and the shot going off by the concussion, there was a faint cry. I instantly recognised the voice as that of Lady Bertha.

The next moment all was confusion. A number of persons, some with torches in their hands, came rushing wildly up, and in the midst of them I recognised Boris and Dr. Schwartz, the latter carrying a lantern. Approaching, he held it up to my face, and at once cried out, "He is wounded!"

There was another subdued cry, and raising my head with some difficulty, I beheld her whose voice was ringing like soft music in the

air, close to my left side. I tried to speak, and to lift my wounded arm, but the effort made the stream of blood gush forth more and more rapid, and everything before my eyes became dim and faint. Gradually I sank, and sinking felt as if my head was leaning against the soft hand of Bertha.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Like the wanderer of the desert,
When, across the dreary sand,
Breathes the perfume from the thickets
Bordering on the promised land :
When afar he sees the palm trees
Cresting o'er the lonely well,
When he hears the pleasant tinkle
Of the distant camel's bell—
So a fresh and glad emotion
Rose within my swelling breast,
And I hurried swiftly onwards
To the haven of my rest."

AYTOUN, *Buried Flower*.

THE warm sun rays were falling in upon me when I re-opened my eyes. A long blissful dream seemed to have just come to an end, and I felt sorry almost to have awoke so soon, and much inclined to go to sleep again. But the slight stir I made, on turning my head a little aside, appeared to rouse a person close to my couch, and before I had time to raise myself and look around me, the sound of quick steps

fell upon my ear, followed by the opening and closing of a door.

The noise caused me to lift up my head, and to examine the place I was in. It was the same room, I saw at a glance, which I had entered after the last pressure of Bertha's hand, in which I had felt, for a few short hours, all the pangs and all the blessedness of love, and which I had quitted, finally, in company with Dr. Schwartz. But had I quitted it really? Or was the idea of it, and of successive events, vaguely floating through my brain, a mere part of a dream?

I was commencing to gather together the scattered threads of my memory, and to separate the corporeal events of the past from the visions of sleep, when a door, right opposite to my bed, was thrown open, and Dr. Schwartz stepped over the threshold. His face bore a pleasant smile as he came towards me, with extended arm.

"We are getting on well," he exclaimed, giving me a kindly shake of the hand, and at the same time bending my head back on the pillow; "we are getting on well, but there must be no excitement for the present."

"I am not at all excited, I assure you," I replied, "but was only looking about the room."

"All right!" rejoined the doctor, feeling my pulse, and then sitting down close to me. "I extracted the bullet from your arm very easily," he went on, "and as you have had a nice ten hours' sleep since, I will allow you to sit upright a little while, on condition of not talking too much." And he softly raised the cushion under my head, and me with it.

"So you extracted a bullet?" I exclaimed, looking at Dr. Schwartz. "I was still uncertain at this moment whether it was a fact or a dream that I had fought a duel with Count Labanoff."

"Your doubt is justified, for the matter is well-nigh incredible," the doctor answered promptly; "it seems to me utterly strange that you, whom I always looked upon as a rather thoughtful young man, should engage in a duel, while I am no less surprised that Nikita, the declared enemy of human errors and prejudices, despiser of war and warlike actions, and champion of pure reason, should play that mad and monstrous game."

"I was not the challenger," I cried, "nor did I willingly——"

"I know all," interrupted Dr. Schwartz; "but though Nikita accused himself of being the sole guilty party in the affair, I think not the less that you must bear a share of the blame, as you ought not to have accepted his challenge on any consideration, and on whatever provocation."

"Then the count bears no longer any ill-will against me?" I asked, much relieved at the announcement made to me.

"So far from bearing you any ill-will, he has become your warmest friend all on a sudden," replied the doctor, an odd smile flitting across his face. "I believe," he continued after a short pause, "you are as yet far from comprehending Count Labanoff-Rostoffsky. If I remember right, I told you already that he belongs, in my judgment, to the class of men typified in the most brilliant and most sceptical of your modern poets. But to say that the count is full of the Byronic element, is no more than sketching a vague outline of his character. To understand him, you must bear in mind that he is a Russian, that is, in other words, in the same relative intellectual position towards an Englishman, a

Frenchman, or a German, as a tamed bear is to a high-bred horse. Do you understand ? ”

“ I think so,” I replied, smiling ; “ and I fancy what you told me is expressed in the not very polite, but oft-repeated sentence, ‘ Scratch a Russian and you will find a Tartar beneath.’ ”

“ Ah, the poor Tartars ! They are grievously wronged in your aphorism ! ” cried the doctor, with a comical expression of countenance ; “ but let us return to our subject. Count Labanoff, you may believe me, will be your friend henceforth, for although his pride, and other passions, thinly covered under the cloak of Nihilism and indifference, may lead him at times, as in your case, to commit great errors, if not crimes, there is in the depths of his heart an earnest desire to do only what is good and just.”

“ He certainly gave a proof of it in frankly confessing that he had been the aggressor in the duel,” I remarked.

“ He did more than that,” Dr. Schwartz went on ; “ his grief was extreme when he learned that you had fainted from loss of blood, and it was only when I had extracted the bullet which his pistol had sent into your shoulder, and told him that

the wound threatened not the least danger, that he quitted your bedside. He has now gone to Sebastopol in your interest."

"In my interest?" I cried, "surely you are joking!"

"If you think so, I will say nothing more about it," drily rejoined the doctor.

My curiosity was put on the stretch by the remark, and I begged the doctor to be so kind as to explain the meaning of his words.

"Well, since you are so anxious to know it," he exclaimed, after a little tantalizing pause, "I tell you, in strict confidence, that Count Labanoff has gone to Sebastopol for the special purpose of freeing you of your double chains, those which tie you, on the one hand, as an enlisted soldier, to the military service of Great Britain, and on the other, as a prisoner of war, to the authority of the sovereign of Russia."

"He will never be able to get my discharge," I exclaimed, greatly surprised at what I learnt.

"I do not know as to that," quietly replied Dr. Schwartz; "high friends and golden keys open many doors." Seeing me shake my head,

he continued, "Ah, mein Freund, war and soldiering are queer games, in which the players at the top shake hands, while those at the bottom cut each other's throats. Kings and queens never cease to address each other as brothers and sisters after they have set their subjects fighting together, and the example is duly followed by the minor gods of the earth."

"Then you think it possible that the count may obtain both my discharge as a soldier, and liberation as a prisoner of war?" I asked, not without eagerness.

"I think it not only possible, but very probable," rejoined the doctor, smiling, "seeing that each of the two characters with which you are invested at present consumes the other, just as two elements in chemistry, when mixed together, often neutralize their opposite forces. The neutralization in this instance may be the easier effected through the action of some imperial prince, or other high personage, as operating chemist."

I felt more and more surprised at what I learnt, every word starting new trains of thought. "Was it the count's own idea to go on the

errand of which you speak?" I asked the doctor after a little hesitation, "or was he prompted to it by others?"

"Hush! mein Freund, it is time we should leave off talking, for there has been too much of it already," exclaimed Dr. Schwartz. "You require rest above all things, and I would advise you to lie quiet, and harass your brain as little as possible with impertinent questions and aimless surmises. Remember the old proverb, 'Ne quid nimis.' " And lowering my pillow to its former position, and forcing my head gently down upon it, the doctor gave me a friendly nod, and the next moment was out of the room.

I did my best to follow the advice given to me, but to very little purpose. Visions came rushing up, and my imagination toiled in full action, whether I shut my eyes or kept them open; and though resolved to think as little as possible, long lines of thoughts, heart-stirring and burning, came following each other in quick succession. For several hours I kept tossing about restlessly on my couch, the prey alternately of high-flowing hopes and dull melancholy, when at last, to my great delight, the door opened, letting in Donald.

It had got nearly dark in the room, but the twilight that existed was sufficient to show me that my cousin looked very sad and downcast. Nevertheless, his manner contradicted the expression of his countenance, for coming towards me with brisk step, he gave me a hearty shake, at the same time expressing his delight that I was getting on well.

"Dr. Schwartz tells me," he went on, after I had returned the pressure of his hand, "that you have quite a wonderful constitution for recovering from wounds, which are no sooner made when they begin to heal. You are altogether a lucky fellow, Alec!"

I looked up into my cousin's face when he uttered the words, and fancied I could see a dark shade of sadness sweep across it.

"What is the matter with you, Donald?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" he cried, "there are dismal old recollections that start up, now and then, within me, most of all when there is sunshine somewhere else. I fancy there is a villainous feeling of envy in every one's breast, which will crawl forth on occasion, however much

we try to hammer it down." He paused a moment, and then, passing his hand over his eyes, and making an effort to smile, exclaimed, "What nonsense I am talking now! Our friend, the doctor, has only given me permission to stop here for half an hour, and I come to offer my congratulations on the great prize you have won in the lottery of life."

I could not pretend for a moment not to understand what my cousin meant; nevertheless, I stammered forth, making a silly attempt at banter, "I know nothing about a prize I have won, except it is the bullet which Dr. Schwartz extracted from my shoulder a few hours ago."

But Donald did not seem in a humour to admire my wit, and continued somewhat gravely, "I have had a long conversation about you with the doctor, and will tell you the result of it in a few words, if you promise to keep very quiet, and interrupt me as little as possible."

"Speak, I beg you," I exclaimed, agitated by a sudden tremor, and feeling as if the fate of my life was hanging on my cousin's lips.

"I think it is needless to tell you," he began, speaking very calmly, "that the young countess,

Bertha Nordenstam, whose life you saved, is in love with you, and I take it for granted, from what you told me, that you return her affection. The doctor and I agree as to both these facts, and what we have been discussing between us is the best way in which this existing mutual love can be brought to its practical sequence, a marriage."

"Good heavens! Donald," I broke out, "how can I think of——"

"Don't interrupt me, Alec! And don't be a fool!" my cousin went on, cutting my exclamation short; "there is less necessity that you should think than that you should act. Dr. Schwartz, as well as I, understand your character, and it is precisely on this account, and knowing that, with abundance of physical, you possess not enough of moral courage, that we tender our counsel. If it is not welcome, say so at once."

"My dear Donald, there are no two men in the world whom I would trust more, and follow more, than you and the doctor," I cried, stretching forth my hand.

"Good, then; and listen quietly!" my cousin went on. "You cannot expect, of course, that

Lady Bertha should take the initiative of offering her hand, and therefore you will have to throw, at the first opportunity, your romantic shyness to the winds, and speak out like a man. You can do so with the more freedom and ease, as she was partly brought up in England, where her father held a diplomatic mission at the time you saved her life. For the rest, the doctor will settle all matters. He has known her from her infancy, and by the will of her mother, a native of Germany, who died many years ago, is acting as a sort of guardian over her, so that all difficulties are smoothed in this direction."

Every word my cousin uttered fell upon me like burning fire. Having got thus far, I could not help interrupting him again. "You speak of marriage as if it was the easiest thing in the world," I cried, "and forget all the immense difference of rank and fortune that exists between me and Bertha."

"Rank and fortune!" exclaimed Donald, in excited tone; "you make me angry, Alec, with your absurd humility. Are not you, what I consider myself, a gentleman, born and bred; and do you believe a gentleman of Scotland to be

inferior to a Russian lady? If that is your real feeling, I hold my tongue, and say good-bye ! ”

“ My dear Donald, you are too hard upon me ! ” I cried, stretching out my hand once more.

“ All right, Alec ! I think I spoke with too much warmth, as you touched a chord which is apt to vibrate strongly within me,” my cousin made reply. “ Now I have not much more to say to you,” he went on, after a short pause, “ except that as soon as you are quite well, and your marriage is fixed, I shall try to get exchanged, and return to my regiment.”

“ Are you not tired of a soldier’s life ? ” exclaimed I, feeling quite sad at the announcement. “ and would you not like to settle down in some peaceful occupation ? ”

“ No, no ! ” Donald broke forth, “ I must not think of it ! There is no peace of body, unless there is peace of mind, and I should only worry out my life in brooding over the past were I to quit the wild, vagabond existence in which I embarked when hit so sorely.” There was darkness all around, not allowing me to see my cousin’s face, but I fancied a strange, fierce gleam came darting from his eyes.

I was just thinking how I could cheer my poor relative by a few consoling words, when servants entered the room with lights, in the wake of whom followed others carrying trays with refreshments, destined for me, in their hands. Eager for further conversation, I begged Donald to stop, but he refused, and I had to eat my supper alone. Soon after, I fell into sound sleep, undisturbed till the break of another day.

Dr. Schwartz paid me a visit soon after I woke, and allowed me to get up; but various attempts I made to lead him into talk, on the subject all-engrossing to my mind, proved fruitless, and he quitted me after only a short stay. I passed the day in a very lonely mood, seeing nobody but the servants who brought me food and drink, and being told, in answer to my inquiries, that both the doctor and my cousin had left the house on a short journey.

Another day came, and it was still the same, the long hours passing on wearily, and steeping my mind in melancholy. It seemed to me extraordinarily strange that after having been the object of so much attention before, I should now be left alone all on a sudden, nobody apparently

taking any interest in me, nor caring whether I were alive or dead. Evening having arrived, I was on the point of seeking rest and forgetfulness on my couch, when at last Donald made his appearance.

I greeted him with almost a shriek of joy, and at once set to anxiously inquiring what had taken him away from me so long. The explanation came in a few words. My cousin told me that early the day before, the news had arrived that Count Labanoff had fallen seriously ill on the road to Sebastopol, and that, on the demand of Dr. Schwartz, he had accompanied the latter as assistant, to look after and attend upon the patient, and had just returned from the journey.

"Is the count better?" I asked.

"Yes, he is," was the reply; "the illness, described by the courier who brought the report as very grave, was, we found, but a fit of profound mental despondency, which had thrown him on his bed, in a house full of associations of the past. It was not the first time I saw the house, which you know, too, for you played on the piano within the walls, performing 'Auld lang syne' with full choral accompaniment."

"You mean the mansion at Belbek, where I saw Bertha's portrait?" I broke out.

"The same," replied Donald, very quietly, "it is the property of the count, and that portrait did all the mischief. It was painted, it appears, by his order about twelve months ago, when he cherished the hope of being able to bring the original there one day. Alas, poor Yorick! He did not reckon upon the invasion of the Crimea, and the arrival of the 17th Lancers."

I felt not at all inclined to join in the banter of my cousin, and to turn the subject asked him whether the count had continued his route to Sebastopol.

"Yes, he rode away the same moment we left," my cousin answered, "and had the kindness, before getting into saddle, to promise me to procure my freedom."

"So you are bent upon leaving me, Donald?" I ejaculated.

"It cannot be helped, Alec!" cried he, seizing my hand, and looking at me with a sorrowful glance. "But I do not expect to get off before the beginning of the summer," he added, "and should like to employ the time till then in a

visit to the good German people with whom you stayed for several weeks, and about whom and whose doings Dr.Schwartz grows quite eloquent."

"You mean Herr Ulrich's family, at Friedenthal?" I exclaimed.

"I do," my cousin replied.

"The poor fellow Johann, who brought you up from Friedenthal, and who, by-the-bye, is a singular specimen of that lofty intelligence which, the doctor tells me, exists in the little colony, returns to-morrow, and I have a good mind to take a seat in his cart."

"I should like very much to go with you," I exclaimed, under a sudden impulse, anxious to enjoy as much as possible of my cousin's company before his quitting me, perhaps for ever.

"Very well, I will arrange with Johann, so that we can start a little before daybreak to-morrow morning," Donald replied. Thus saying, he gave a nod of the head, and before I well knew what he was about had closed the door behind him.

I passed a dreary night, miserable at the thought of leaving the house in which was she in whom all my life had come to be centered. The

arrangement I had made with Donald, I felt ashamed to break ; yet I was fearful at the same time that my sudden departure would displease Bertha, and might even be misjudged by my kind friend, the doctor. For hours and hours, I kept reflecting on the subject, my head full of troubles and anxieties, till at last, towards morning, my eyes closed in sheer fatigue.

The sleep I enjoyed did not last long, for the grey dawn had not yet risen, when Donald stood at my bedside. "The cart is waiting at the door," he cried, giving me a violent shake, "and Johann is in despair to be off, so as not to miss his Abend-essen at home."

I felt little inclination to join in the laugh with which Donald uttered the words ; however, I dressed in haste, and in a few minutes, guided by my cousin, found myself in front of Herr Ulrich's cart. It was now clear of potatoes, and loaded with straw, on the top of which, behind Johann and his pipe, we took our seat, and then rolled off through the dark streets of Baktchi-Serai. They were empty and silent, and there was nobody to oppose our progress, till we came to the archway, where we had been stopped on entering the town.

Here, too, a few words from our conductor sufficed to clear the way, and the next minute we careered, at a good speed, along the hard-frozen road, running through open fields.

Feeling still oppressed with melancholy, I had no inclination to speak, and Donald remaining silent likewise, I threw myself back in the straw, and tried to go to sleep. The attempt succeeded, and I did not awake till the cart had come to a standstill, and I saw before us the house where I had met the loquacious Frau who had entertained us previously. I took again a few refreshments, and had to answer many questions ; but Donald, who appeared to be in one of the gloomiest of his moods, would not let us stay long, and to the great grief of our driver, made him resume his seat before he had taken more than half his usual quantity of victuals. Once more now we proceeded on our road, and Johann using his whip well, our cart reached Friedenthal while yet the sun, which had shone brilliantly all day long, was standing high on the western horizon.

I was glad when the journey which had been so silent and dreary, was at an end, and the pleasure was heightened by the hearty reception I met with

on the part of Herr Ulrich and his wife. They received me just as if I had been an only son, and their deep and genuine affection made me almost forget for a moment the passion that was clinging to my heart.

My sojourn at Friedenthal lasted much longer than I expected at the outset. I had contemplated staying not more than a month, but before the period came to an end, a letter arrived from Dr. Schwartz, recommending that Donald and I should remain the guests of Herr Ulrich until further arrangements could be made, and promising that he would come and see us very soon. I felt a new access of melancholy when I read the note; but my cousin laughed it off, not ceasing in his endeavours to divert me till he had attained his end.

I saw very little of Mike for a time; but almost the first week of our stay at Friedenthal, he and Donald became fast friends. My cousin was full of admiration of all the good qualities of my old comrade, while I felt more impressed than ever by the great change that had taken place in Mike's character since he had gained the love of Herr Ulrich's fair daughter. He had become,

and got daily more and more, quiet in manners and behaviour, and almost polished in speech, losing everything of the old trooper, so far as to show almost an aversion to wine and spirits, now abundantly at his command. He never drank at table; but I often watched him looking with a glance of inexpressible fondness at the blue-eyed maiden who sat at his side, while she returned to him the sweetest of her smiles.

The marriage of my comrade with Herr Ulrich's daughter was fixed to take place on the first of May, her birthday, and both Donald and I had to give our promise to stay until then. It was whispered into my ear by our host that a little surprise would be awaiting us at that day; but I took little notice of the remark, expecting nothing more but that the event would bring forth the papers of discharge from the army for both Mike and me, which, I had reason to believe, from a hint in a letter received by my cousin from Dr. Schwartz, had already been procured through the twofold action of himself and Nikita.

Time flew on fast in the happy uniformity of life we were leading, and almost before I knew

it the first of May arrived. The country far and wide had become a magnificent garden, and Mike and Mary walked to church on a path overhung by myrtles and fragrant jessamine, while the children of the village, which was making holiday, strewed roses at their feet. The religious ceremony, resembling very nearly the Presbyterian rite, being finished, the little procession returned to the house, where we sat down to a grand family Mittag-essen, presided over by Herr Ulrich, with the bridegroom at his right, and the blushing bride, more scarlet than the roses that were peeping in at the window, at his left hand. Another festive board was spread in the garden, at which one half the inhabitants of Friedenthal appeared to regale themselves, repaying the hospitality offered to them by singing frequently in chorus, in very good style.

The sun was getting low before the entertainment was over, and all the garden visitors having departed, with a profusion of handshakings and congratulations, we had some music among ourselves in the room. First Mike and his young wife, and then Herr and Frau Ulrich gave us little songs, after which Donald sat

down to the piano. He intoned, in deep bass, a Scottish lay that stirred all the fibres of my heart. One of the verses ran :—

“Love descended to the window,
Love removed the bolt and bar,
Love was warder to the lovers
From the dawn to even-star.”

The words were still vibrating in the air, when the door, close to which I stood, opened, and there entered a lady, in half mourning, accompanied by a stout gentleman. I fell back a step in awe on beholding myself face to face with Lady Bertha, at the side of Dr. Schwartz. Before a word could come to my lips, Bertha stretched out her hand to me, exclaiming, “You fly from us, and so we must seek you!”

“Did you, indeed, wish to see me?” I stut-tered, not knowing what to say.

“I came but to see you, Alec!” she answered, quietly and earnestly, her eyes fixed upon me with an inexpressible glance.

The words and the look inspired me with sudden courage. Dr. Schwartz had stepped forward to greet Herr Ulrich and the newly-married pair, and Bertha and I were standing

alone. I grasped the soft hand that was lying in mine, and in a paroxysm of passion, cried, "I love you beyond utterance: will you be mine, Bertha?"

There was a minute's pause, which to me seemed an age. "I will!" she whispered, in scarce audible tone.

Deep silence had spread through the room all on a sudden. Looking up, with Bertha's hand in my own, I saw every eye fixed upon us, and Dr. Schwartz upright at the head of the table. "I cannot sing, like our friend Donald," he exclaimed, "but, with your permission, I will recite a few words:—

"'The treasures of the deep are not so precious
As are the conceal'd comforts of a man
Lock'd up in woman's love.'"

FINIS.



